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STEPHEN & GILLIAN'S TASTY POP ADVENTURE

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"TAYLOR SWIFT DIDN'T INVENT WRITING PERSONAL SONGS!"

THOMAS DOLBY
"I SHOULD HAVE STUCK TO MY GUNS LIKE A POST-JAPAN DAVID SYLVIAN..."

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

MARC ALMOND

INSIDE HIS DEFIANT RETURN
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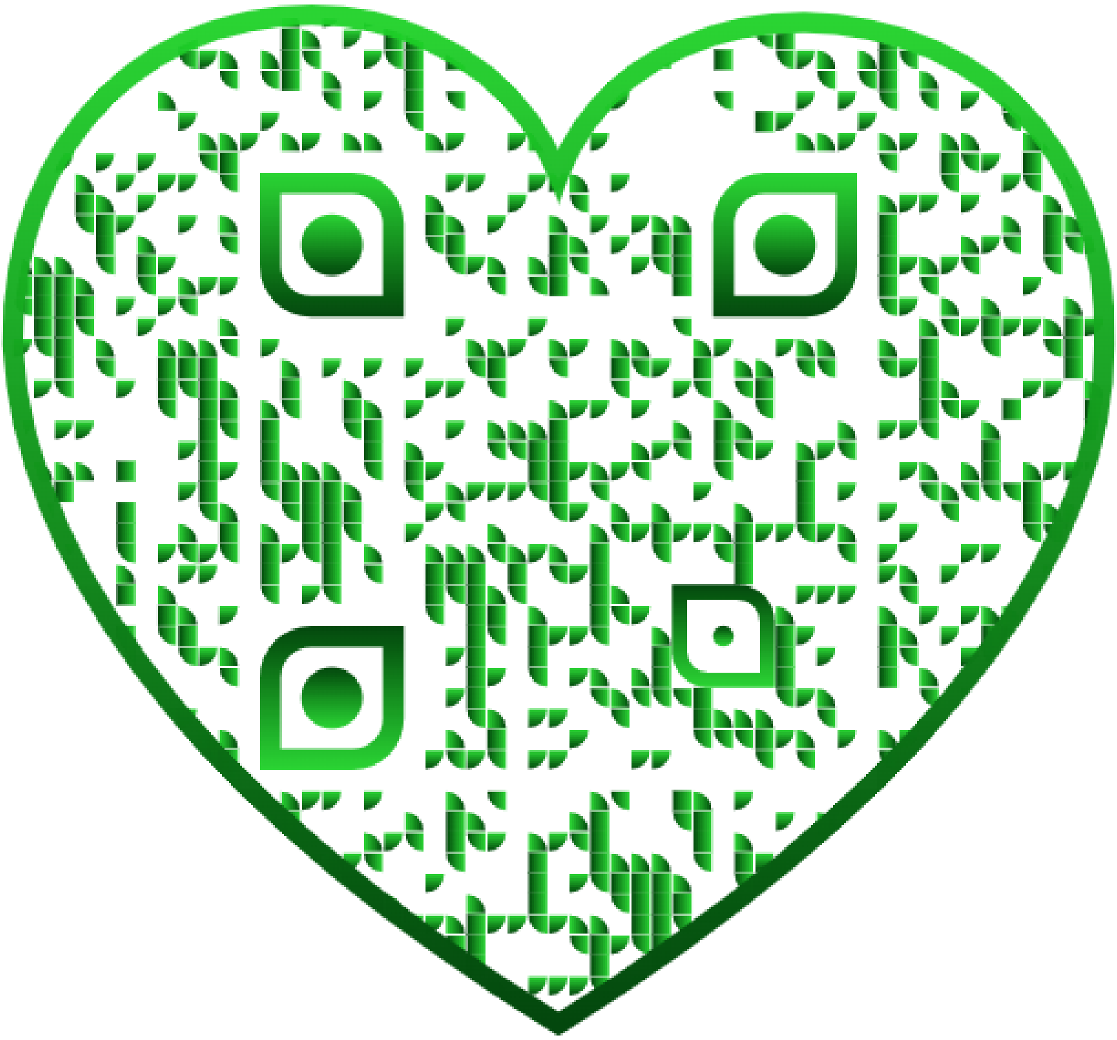

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WELCOME

You should never underestimate the power of a great cover version.

Across the decades its pecking order position in the music world may well have changed, but the impact of a well-chosen cover can still stretch far and wide.

Rewind to the 50s and 60s where songwriting epicentres such as London's Tin Pan Alley and the iconic Brill Building in New York held sway and you would regularly see multiple versions of the same song face off against each other in the pop charts simultaneously.

And that was a trend accelerated by the rise of The Beatles where every morsel that Lennon & McCartney served up was seized upon as a potential hit by countless artists of the day. The concept has disappeared in the modern era but covers remains a superb vehicle for introducing a songwriter's work to a larger or different fanbase. In the UK, that's been seen down the years with various Radio One *Live Lounge* tracks as well as Radio Two's successful *Piano Room*.

Our latest cover star Marc Almond is, of course, a master of the art. Many people would argue that Soft Cell's transformation of Gloria Jones' Northern Soul floorfiller *Tainted Love* into a synth-pop classic is the greatest cover version of all time and who are we to disagree. As a solo artist, Marc has regularly released albums of covers that put a dazzling new perspective on some well-known but often overlooked gems. His latest studio LP, *I'm Not Anyone*, once more pinballs around genres and is typical of his adventurous nature.

Only the ever-defiant Marc Almond would have the audacity to release an album that traverses material by the likes of King Crimson, Neil Diamond and Mahalia Jackson within the space of a single record. The LP also includes a track made famous by easy listening Irish crooner Val Doonican no less. It's a million miles from Soft Cell's *Sex Dwarf* that's for sure.

Elsewhere, we have further exclusive interviews with the returning Eddi Reader and Mark Nevin of Fairground Attraction who've reformed the band after 35 years of estrangement, plus New Order mainstays Stephen Morris and Gillian Gilbert revisit their poppy side project The Other Two – I think the reissue of the latter's debut album *The Other Two & You* even took them by surprise. And it's a final doff of the mortar board to Professor Thomas Dolby who reveals all about what we can expect from his upcoming, and very rare, UK live shows.

Enjoy the issue!

Steve Harnell, Editor

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CLASSIC POP WHO'S WHO

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*1 "A delicate folky reinvention of one of Prince's finest songs. Frazey Ford's inimitable vocals are a masterclass in understated elegance."

*2 "So good (almost) everyone thinks that it's the original."

*3 "Anyone who doesn't say that or *Tainted Love* is overthinking it."

*4 "Roland Gift is an underrated singer anyway but Jimmy Somerville's incredible backing vocals elevate this is above the original."

*5 "A beautifully melancholic reimagining of a Tears For Fears gem."

*6 "Transformed a country obscurity into a synth-pop classic."

*7 "Why this languished in a vault for years until the 2014 reissue of *Nightclubbing* is a total mystery."

*8 "Joan's biggest hit, a cover of the Arrows' stomper delivered with swagger and, improbably, a straight face."

*9 "An epic, earnest version that let Andy Taylor rip a timeless guitar solo!"

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The winner of the Best Writer, Specialist category, in 2022's British Society of Magazine Editors Awards, our latest issue sees **John Earls** talking to Marc Almond about his new covers album *I'm Not Anyone* as well as The Other Two's Stephen Morris and Gillian Gilbert. John also oversees our new albums and reissues reviews sections.

Paul Kirkley makes his living from interviewing famous people with much more interesting and glamorous lives than his own. He is also, to the best of his knowledge, the only paid TV critic for a national supermarket chain. This issue, Paul catches up with Eddi Reader and Mark Nevin from Fairground Attraction for an exclusive interview as the band reveal all about their comeback after 35 years apart.

Wyndham Wallace has written for *The Guardian*, *Uncut* and *The Quietus*. His Travis documentary, *Almost Fashionable*, has been broadcast on Sky Arts. In the latest *Classic Pop*, he talks to Nick Heyward about his upcoming solo plans and work with the reunited Haircut 100 before taking a look at Tears For Fears' *Everybody Loves A Happy Ending* for our *Forget Me Not* feature.

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1979-1981 Paul Edmond was the semi-official photographer at the Rum Runner and other Birmingham clubs frequented by Duran Duran. Most of his images have never been seen until now.

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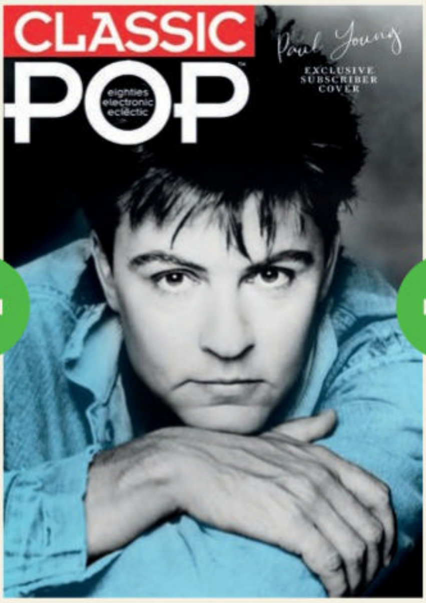

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This Is The Day: At long last, The The are back with a new album and extensive world tour

"I HOPE PEOPLE GET OUT OF THE ALBUM WHAT WE PUT INTO IT. IT WAS CREATED UNDER VERY HAPPY CIRCUMSTANCES, WITH A GREAT VIBE AMONGST THE BAND AND PEOPLE THAT WORKED ON IT."
MATT JOHNSON

POP UP

SOULFUL RETURN OF THE THE WITH NEW STUDIO LP

The The have thrilled fans with the announcement of their first studio album of all new material in almost a quarter of a century.

The 12-track album *Ensoulment* will be released on 6 September and features the same incarnation of the Matt Johnson-fronted band that formed for 2018's string of live comeback dates including Primal Scream collaborator Barrie Cadogan on lead guitar.

Written, demoed and mixed at Studio Cinéola in London as well as a further six-day session at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios near Bath, the album also marks the return of co-producer and engineer Warne Livesey, who previously worked on landmark The The LPs *Infected* in 1986 and 1989's *Mind Bomb*.

Having last released a studio album in 2000 with the *NakedSelf* LP, Johnson's lengthy absence was partly explained in his 2017 multimedia project, *The Inertia Variations* which took inspiration from British poet John Tottenham's 2005 book of the same name – particularly the idea of "brooding, abstraction and evasion" getting in the way of the creative process – resulting in a feature-length documentary and the *Radio Cinéola Trilogy* boxset.

At the close of *The Inertia Variations* documentary, Johnson performs a new song live, *We Can't Stop What's Coming*. The track is an elegy to his elder brother Andrew (aka Andy Dog), who died in 2016. "It was not an easy song to write," Matt says. "That was the first time I'd sung in many years. I enjoyed it but found it very emotional."

The experience prompted Johnson to revive The The as a live band, leading to The Comeback Special sold out world tour of 2018. Covid delayed the release of the accompanying live film and LP until 2021 – and hampered the intended start on the writing and recording of *Ensoulment*. Instead, The The released a series of 7" singles comprising the aforementioned *We Can't Stop What's Coming* followed by *I Want 2 B U* and *$1 One Vote!*.

Ensoulment finds Johnson unafraid to tackle complex terrain: intimacy in an age of alienation; democracy in a post-truth age; empire and vassalage; and the inexorable rise of AI. He's keen, though, to stress the album's positivity. "It's vital to be hopeful," Johnson states. "And I hope people get out of the album what we put into it. It was created under very happy circumstances, with a great vibe amongst the band and all the people that worked on it. There was a lot of thought, a lot of work, a lot of love, a lot of laughter!"

Featuring previously unpublished works by Matt's late brother, *Ensoulment* will be issued as a limited CD hardcover mediabook, a CD jewelcase, 2LP black gatefold vinyl and limited crystal clear 2LP gatefold vinyl. Further exclusive formats will be available from the band's official album store.

Formed by Johnson in 1979, The The have released just five studio LPs of original material to date but the singer has diversified into covers albums, soundtracks, art installations and film.

A tour to coincide with the release of *Ensoulment* sold out and the band have announced an additional date at the O2 Brixton Academy on 1 October.

An Oasis reunion is still a maybe, but fans can definitely enjoy a batch of unreleased curios and outtakes

© Paul Slattery

FRESH TWIST ON *DEFINITELY MAYBE* TO CELEBRATE ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

With the warring Gallagher brothers still no closer to settling their differences, Oasis fans will have to content themselves with an expanded version of the band's landmark debut LP *Definitely Maybe* to celebrate its 30th birthday.

The remastered version of the 1994 classic album also boasts unheard recordings and new artwork.

Available on 30 August, a 30th Anniversary Deluxe Edition of the record-breaking Britpop debut features tracks from the album's discarded original recording sessions at Monnow Valley Studios in Monmouthshire, along with outtakes from the definitive album laid down at Sawmills Studios in Cornwall, newly mixed for the first time by Noel Gallagher and Callum Marinho. These Monnow Valley recordings and outtakes from the Sawmill sessions have been recently unearthed, offering fans a fresh insight into the album.

The sessions were ultimately scrapped, and the band moved to the remote confines of Sawmills Studios to re-record the LP. The vinyl edition of the album also includes an unreleased 1992 demo version of *Sad Song*. Originally released as a bonus track on the album, this alternative version features Liam on vocals.

The package also boasts new artwork by designer Brian Cannon for Microdot and original sleeve photographer Michael Spencer Jones, plus new sleevenotes from Creation Records boss Alan McGee and journalist Hamish MacBain.

The 30th Anniversary Deluxe Edition of *Definitely Maybe* is available to preorder now on limited-edition deluxe 4LP vinyl and deluxe 2CD formats plus exclusive 'strawberries and cream' marbled pink vinyl. It will also be available on limited-edition blue cassette and digital formats. All formats include the 2014 remastered version of the album.

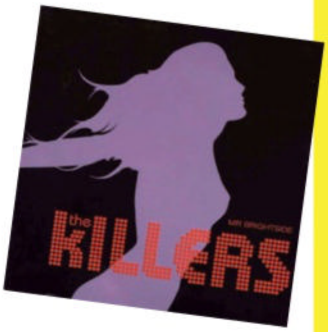
On its initial release in August 1994, *Definitely Maybe* became the fastest selling debut album of all time.

Generational anthems from the Human League

The Human League have announced details of the Generations Tour, which sees the band hit Europe and the UK this winter.

The 19-date jaunt begins in Sweden on 15 November before heading to Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The final eight dates of the tour return to home soil. Starting at Cardiff's Motorpoint Arena on 5 December, the UK leg takes in Manchester, Birmingham, Brighton, Bournemouth, Glasgow and Leeds with a final date at London's Wembley OVO Arena on 14 December. Support at the UK shows comes from Sophie Ellis-Bextor and T'Pau.

Mr Brightside breaks UK chart record



The Killers' *Mr Brightside* has overtaken Oasis' *Wonderwall* to become the UK's biggest single of all time not to reach No.1.

According to data from the Official Charts Company, combined UK sales and streams of 5.57 million (including 1.1 million sales and 530,340,000 streams – 100 paid streams or 600 free streams equal one sale), has made the modern pop anthem the third biggest song of all time in the UK.

Initially released in 2003, The Killers' debut single had a run of just 500 CDs and failed to dent the UK chart. However, when follow-up *Somebody Told Me* charted at No.28, *Mr Brightside* was reissued and peaked at No.10. Now, with more than 410 weeks in the UK Top 100, it's the longest-running hit in Official Chart history. The band's Rebel Diamonds Tour hits the UK and Ireland this summer and includes arena dates in Manchester, Glasgow, London and Dublin.

Jim Kerr scoops top radio award

Simple Minds frontman Jim Kerr has won a prestigious Gold Medal for Best Documentary at the New York Festivals International Radio Awards for his recent documentary about The Doors' singer Jim Morrison.

Kerr's first outing as a documentary maker, *Jim Kerr On Jim Morrison* was written and presented by the singer and explores one of the 60s most controversial musicians.

"We're really touched by the recognition," said Kerr. "Every great documentary relies on compelling subject matter and in the history of rock surely there can be no more compelling subject than the music and poetry of Jim Morrison and The Doors."

The documentary finds Jim travelling to Morrison's grave in Paris and reflecting on how the iconic poet and vocalist has influenced his own life and career. The documentary is available to hear now on BBC Sounds.

BERNARD BUTLER

Q+A

AS HE RELEASES HIS FIRST NEW SOLO RECORD IN OVER TWO DECADES, THE SONGWRITER, PRODUCER AND FORMER SUEDE GUITARIST, REFLECTS ON A CAREER THAT'S BEEN "A MASTERCLASS IN MUSIC"

BILL DEMAIN

Bernard Butler never meant for there to be a 25-year gap between solo albums. It's just that after 1999's *Friends And Lovers*, he got very busy doing other things – among them, producing Duffy and Tricky, co-writing with Texas, Edwyn Collins and Altered Images, going on tour with Ben Watt, as well as making a Mercury-nominated duets album with the actress Jessie Buckley. "Each experience gave me something new to think about and develop," Butler says. It was the latter project's freewheeling songwriting process – open tunings, random phrases lifted from books, unconventional structures – that informed Butler's latest release *Good Grief*. Against a painterly canvas of acoustic guitars, strings and brass, Butler's fathoms-deep voice explores the big topics of love, loss, joy and being awestruck by the random beauty of life. "A lot of the record is about that bewilderment we all feel," he says. "That thing of, 'How did I get here? How has this all happened?'"

How does it feel reconnecting with your solo career and your fans after 25 years?
We're all completely different people, right? Anyone who heard me back then is now a different person. As a fan, unfortunately, you forget how you've moved on. Your connection might feel like, "Oh, it was just yesterday that I was listening to your record, and I'm the same as I was then. So can you connect with me now in the same way?" With this new record, I don't feel like I'm trying to reconnect with anyone at all. I've made so many, I don't see the distinction between where I write something, play something, produce something, sing something. The records all kind of pile up for me in one continuous body of work.

Do you feel like there's more at stake for you as an artist at 54?
I wouldn't call it more at stake. But has time changed my approach to music? My approach changes daily. When I make a record, whether it's Sam Lee or Jessie Buckley, it changes what I do, how I think. That's the greatest thing about my musical journey: to take something from each experience and develop it. That can be a slight surprise for people who are fans, who might see me as only one thing.

There's lots of natural imagery in the lyrics. How does nature affect your songwriting?
I've lived in North London all my life. So I didn't grow up learning a great deal about nature. I find it fascinating when I go to the sea, to see people just looking at the waves, saying nothing. We're entranced by it – when you see the horizon, you see possibility. A lot of the record is talking about that. I'm just describing my own bewilderment about why I go somewhere, seeing all these beautiful things, then come back to London and spend my whole time looking at police helicopters or 747s in the sky [laughs]. We all wonder about everything that happens outside of our own world. It makes us stop in our tracks. It's about connecting with emotions and a deeper part of yourself.

What does the title *Good Grief* mean to you?
I think it's quite an English expression. I associate it with the *Carry On* films, those silly comedies with Sid James and Barbara Windsor. I like that it describes a sense of bewilderment at the world. A lot of the record is about that bewilderment. But also, it gets at the positive side of grief. Grief is the only consistent thing that will happen to every one of us. I've experienced it in the last year, so it's been big in my life. There's sadness, but also a sense of humour about going through the process, because a lot of it is quite farcical. I hope these songs shine a light and make people feel positive about something that is difficult.

You've worked with numerous artists over the years. What do you recall about the writing of *Yes* with David McAlmont?
That was one of the first things I wrote after I left Suede. I suppose it was kind of a reaction to the angsty young man I was. I'd been listening to Dusty Springfield and The Walker Brothers, and was inspired by that big joyous, explosive soul sound. I met David one night, and we wrote the song the next day, very quickly. It has really endured and is still one of my favourite things I've done.

What stands out about working on Duffy's *Rockferry* album?
When we met, I was almost her last resort. She had done sessions, all straightforward, nice tracks, but nothing stood out. She didn't know who I was, I don't think she really trusted me. She'd come down from Wales by train. And we were talking about that, and I said that songs are like trains. There's a starting point, there's a destination. Along the way, you have these decisions where you can then fork off, this way or that. We zoomed in on this and wrote the title song together. I'm thinking, "This is going great." She did three vocal takes, and at the end, said, "I hate it." She hated her voice really high. And I said, "I love it." We went our separate ways. I put the drumbeat behind it, added a load of reverb on her voice. I knew it was special. That became the record.

Good Grief* is Bernard Butler's third solo LP, following 1998's *People Move On* and 1999's *Friends And Lovers

MY APPROACH CHANGES DAILY. WHENEVER I MAKE A RECORD, IT CHANGES WHAT I DO, HOW I THINK. THAT'S THE GREATEST THING ABOUT MY MUSICAL JOURNEY: TO TAKE SOMETHING FROM EACH EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOP IT.

Did she come to like it?
Of course. It sold eight million copies [laughs]. I saw her last week and we still get on really well. She's been through an awful lot in her life.

What was it like working with Texas on *Big World*?
Sharleen and Johnny are such a close-knit unit. They may go from producer to producer, but they know exactly what they want, so it always becomes a Texas record.

We love *The Moon Shines Bright*, the song that you produced for Sam Lee and Elizabeth Fraser. How was it recording her?
Actually, we sent her the track and she did it herself. I remember I'd been out one evening late. I'd had a couple of drinks and received an email from Elizabeth. She said, "Here's the song. You probably don't want to use it because it's not very good. But I thought I'd send it anyway." I remember going straight to my studio, putting it on and there's that voice from Cocteau Twins that I'd grown up with. I'm just going, "Wow". It was a beautiful moment.

Is there a secret for getting great performances out of singers?
I think of Dave Godin, who brought Tamla-Motown to the UK. Ace Records put out a compilation of deep soul classics, as he called them. In the sleevenotes, there was a quote from him, "This was the kind of music where the singer was told to stand on the edge of the cliff, and either sing or jump." I love that. If you say that to a singer before a performance, it's quite a profound thing.

You did *Hendra* with Ben Watt from Everything But The Girl. He described you as bringing "the dark to the light"...
I think he's right. I probably tried to bring a little bit of danger to it, a bit of edge, a bit of noise. I had to be very subtle because it was very sensitive what Ben was singing about – the death of his sister. I toured with Ben on and off for about five years, and it inspired where I am now, the way I'm performing, completely solo.

What's coming up for you?
There's a run of shows in June, when the album comes out in the UK. I wrote these songs completely solo, with no other instruments. It has become a great exercise to play without a band. On an improvisational level, it's brilliant – you can go whichever way you want and you feel the audience go with you. You meander in ways that are unexpected – that makes every show completely unique.

● ***Good Grief* is out now via 355 Recordings and reviewed on page 84**

Janet returns to the UK for the first time since Glastonbury Festival in 2019

© Solaiman Fazel

JANET JACKSON ANNOUNCES LONG-AWAITED EURO LIVE SHOWS

Following sold-out live dates in North America, Janet Jackson has revealed she'll extend her Together Again Tour to Europe later this year.

Jackson's shows in Birmingham, London, Glasgow and Manchester, taking place between 27 September and 1 October, will be the singer's first in the UK since her acclaimed Glastonbury Festival performance in 2019.

In a video message Jackson said: "I just wanted to thank you for making this my most successful tour to date. And Europe, I know it's been a minute since we've seen each other but the wait is no longer. I will be taking the Together Again Tour all over Europe this fall. I cannot wait to see you guys; I miss you so much. We've had so much fun with this show, so can't wait to come and have some of that fun with you."

The European leg of the tour will start in Paris on 25 September before making multiple stops in the UK, Germany and Belgium, concluding in Amsterdam on 10 October.

The Together Again Tour will offer fans the chance to celebrate Jackson's 50th anniversary in entertainment and 35 years of *Rhythm Nation 1814*.

The star will be joined by special guest Wyclef Jean with the support act in London yet to be announced.

Brand New Heavies are keeping it in the family

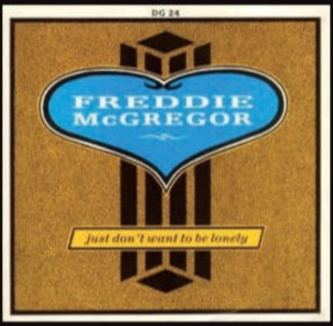
The Brand New Heavies are all set to celebrate three decades of their game-changing album, *Brother Sister*, with a UK tour.

The group, featuring original members Andrew Levy and Simon Bartholomew together with vocalist Angela Ricci, will perform the 1994 album in full alongside other hits and fan favourites from their catalogue across the country this winter.

Opening on 1 November in Sheffield, the eight-date jaunt comes to an end in Birmingham on 20 December and takes in Cambridge, Coventry, Newcastle, Brighton, Cardiff and Frome.

Propelled by the hit singles *Dream On Dreamer*, *Midnight At The Oasis* and *Back To Love*, the group's third album was released in April 1994 and cemented their position as leading pioneers of the Acid Jazz movement. The success continued with their follow-up album *Shelter*, which featured further hits in the shape of *Sometimes*, *You Are The Universe* and the band's take on James Taylor's evergreen *You've Got A Friend*.

1 HIT WONDER



JUST DON'T WANT TO BE LONELY
FREDDIE McGREGOR

A slice of cheerful and optimistic reggae-lite jauntiness gave Jamaican superstar Freddie McGregor a hit in 1987, nearly a quarter of a century after his first record deal. The Clarendonians were a young ska group, and McGregor had to stand on a box to reach the microphone when he first joined them in the studio at just seven years old, working for the legendary Studio One label.

McGregor then went solo in 1979, aged 23, following a period as a Studio One session singer and drummer.

His eventual signature song was a bouncy, electronic Caribbean anthem, with a chirpy rhythm and a lyric of reassurance and reliance, earning extensive radio airplay. Originally recorded by soul star Ronnie Dyson, it had become familiar when funk trio The Main Ingredient's version made the UK Top 30 in 1974. With it, they too became one-hit wonders in the UK.

After a slow climb that began at No.95, McGregor's version eventually peaked at No.9 in the charts during the summer of 1987, aided by his two appearances on *Top Of The Pops*. The song came from his 12th solo LP, simply titled *Freddie McGregor*. The album didn't sell well, but three more singles made the lower reaches of the chart over an 18-month period. He's since released an impressive tally of 26 further albums and, at the age of 67, continues to perform live.

MATTHEW RUDD IS THE HOST OF FORGOTTEN 80s ON ABSOLUTE 80s

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11 THE DOME BRIGHTON
14 THE BRIDGEWATER HALL MANCHESTER
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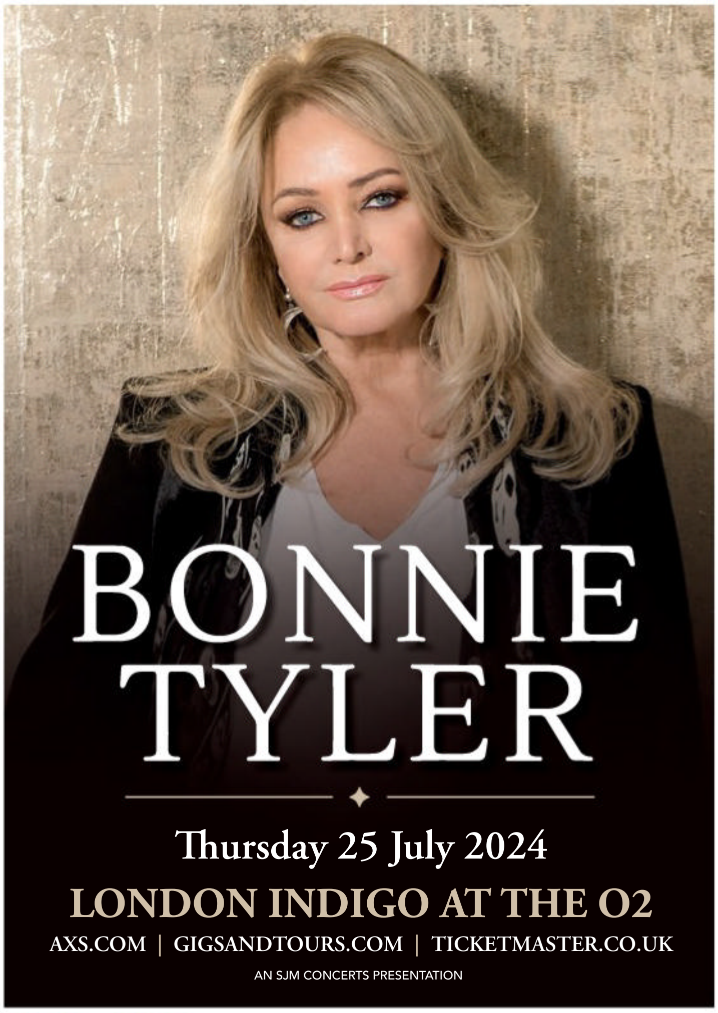
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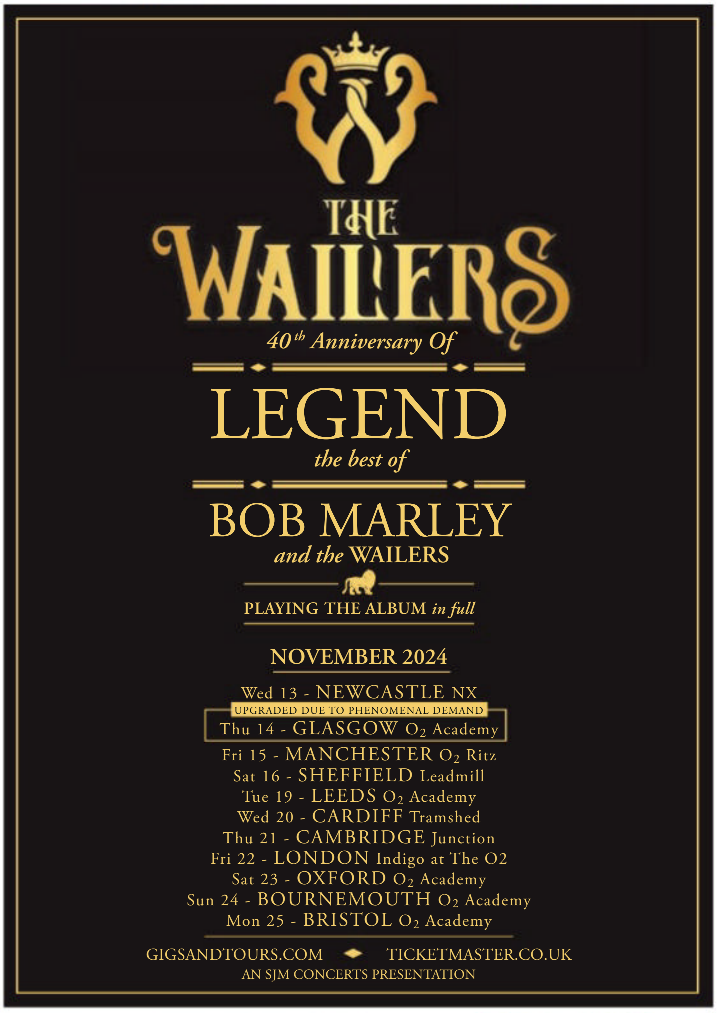
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Images © Steve Ullathorne

NICK HEYWARD

Q+A

OVER 40 YEARS SINCE HAIRCUT 100'S DEBUT SINGLE, *FAVOURITE SHIRTS (BOY MEETS GIRL)*, HELPED MAKE HIM A STAR, THE PERENNIALLY YOUNG SINGER-SONGWRITER GEARS UP TO HIT THE ROAD ONCE MORE

WYNDHAM WALLACE

These are particularly busy times for Nick Heyward, one of the Nicest Men In Pop™. Last year, after the 40th anniversary reissue of Haircut 100's debut album *Pelican West*, the band undertook a UK tour – something he'd never have predicted after their painful separation – and he's currently writing new songs for both them and a set of solo English dates, beginning mid-October. He's in good spirits, too, sprightly as ever in scholarly spectacles, his hair as immaculate as the smile frequently playing across his lips.

He's come a long way, of course, since his days as a teenage pin-up. Nowadays, the man who provoked some of the filthiest fan mail documented in Judy and Fred Vermorel's notorious oral history *Starlust* – though he was once described disparagingly by Echo And The Bunnymen's Ian McCulloch as "the bloke they'd take home to mum" – is considered alongside the likes of Terry Hall, Edwyn Collins, Paddy McAloon and Roddy Frame, as one of Britain's finest songwriters. Nonetheless, he is still receiving saucy messages. "I had someone on Patreon," Nick grins awkwardly, "who said, 'I'm sorry about this, but I'm a perv.' There's a level of self awareness going on there. I said, 'Well, I appreciate that.'"

***Pelican West* was a fantastic debut but, despite its recent reissue, it feels like it's still not given its due. Do you feel it's an underrated album?**

Erm, maybe. I only talk to people that rate it, really, so I don't know, but it definitely underachieved. I mean, it still sounds fresh. That was why when we got back together a few years ago and when the reissue... Wait. Was it a few years ago or last year? [It was February 2023 – Reissues Ed] Wow. Anyway, it's a good body of work. Does it get underrated? Yes, but thankfully it's not *overrated*, which is a godsend. People that discover the album go, 'Well, I never thought it was like *this*!'

The band first reunited in 2004, with another show in 2011, but even in 2017 you told *Classic Pop*, "When we get together now it works onstage absolutely brilliantly, but the personalities offstage – nobody gets on. A very odd bunch of chaps." Why was the time at last right for a tour?

Because it happened organically. The people that were up for doing it just so happened to be Les [Nemes], Graham [Jones] and I. It was our original dream, you know? It was us at the beginning, going out up to Slick Willies in Kensington and buying Converse trainers together. Mine were yellow, Graham's were light sky blue, Les' were red. We were living and breathing the band, socialising and rehearsing together. We were convinced it was going to happen. We were the most enthusiastic about it this time. Then Blair [Cunningham] was there and it just fell together.

And I don't think there was that thing of, "Oh, well it won't stay together." We *all* thought that. I think that's why Mark and Phil didn't really get involved. But then, organically, for want of a better word, the BBC said, "Can you do a Piano Lounge?" And then the real missing ingredient – why we fell apart in the first place – this brilliant management company who keep getting awards said, "Do you want any help?" We had a tour because of that, and that's why we're still together. We're recording an album and going to America. We couldn't have planned any of that!

It's a lovely thing that we're going to be spending time with each other. Les, Graham and I grew up together and to be 60-year-old men together again as friends, it's quite something. We're probably going to be spending time on a coach together and we're really looking forward to it. We got on in a flat above a flower shop with a kitchen and three beds in one lounge, so we know we can get on in bunks!

When you came off stage on the last night of the UK tour, did you know you'd continue?

Yeah, definitely. We said, "This is what we do now, isn't it?" That was it. Everybody got on. It was like a new Haircut 100. I don't remember it being as easy and joyful as this. Even the crowds couldn't believe it! It was a genuinely euphoric feeling everywhere we went and we didn't want to stop.

Did you have any regrets at having waited so long?

Well, there's nothing you can do about that. But there was a sense of, well, "Silly idiots!" We should have just continued, obviously. The people we're playing with now were kind of like, "God, you guys get on so great. Why on earth did you split up?!"

You've mentioned a new album. What can you tell us?

We're doing it old school. We're doing demos right now, just gathering up lots of songs. It's already taken on a bit of shape, quite gritty, which we didn't expect. Musically it seems more like a reflection of British culture. I suppose that's being a band and influences coming in, like Graham's. He's even more Clash than he was, and Les is even more 70s jazz funk. We were in the studio

with Sean [Read] from Dexys and he's going, "God, you really *are* a band, aren't you?" Bands are a different kettle of fish, and I get into a different role. It's almost like standing back and watching it happen.

When do you think the record might be ready?
God, I don't know. This is the good thing about management, because if it was down to me... But I tell you what, I've never been working so flat out on Haircut. Everything's taken a backseat. My wife Sara and I aren't having a holiday. It's going to be sooner rather than later, because management's involved and things get done.

There's also a solo tour on the horizon. What can we expect?
I really started to get into talking during songs on solo tours, and I'm not going to do that. It's going to be a proper show. I'm already planning it now, which I never used to do before. This is going to be a lot more eclectic, definitely, and more music, and also things from the albums I had out during the Creation Records period. *The Apple Bed* didn't get out there at all, so I'm going to attempt to do stuff like that and do it properly. It's not like a Greatest Hits tour, that's for sure, even though I will do those songs. I can do them without thinking, and that's the best thing about performing, not having to worry about the thought of them but just playing them. They play *you*. You just turn up and then you're being played.

In 1995 you told a journalist, "I've never thought of this as a career. If it is, it's been a crap one."
[Laughing] I'm not down on my career now. I can actually call it a career. Terry Hall was the same and we talked about that. I think you can take on board the unsuccessful parts. A very English-conditioned mind would just take on that struggle and then take it personally. So when you stop the blaming and take responsibility that this is what has happened, it's not been perfect, less than graceful sometimes, but it is what it is. There's nothing you can do to change it, you can only change the way you see it. And if you change the way you see it, it suddenly becomes a graceful swan as opposed to, you know, a raggedy old beaver! I just had some interesting attempts at writing memoirs and when you start to join stuff up, it's like putting fabric together and then, before you know it... "Oh, wow!" You realise that everything was connected. Then you stand back and go, "How can you call that a crap career?" I feel honored to have been in that world. I know my place in it as well, you know? But that doesn't mean to say you can stay there. I'm just grateful for everything. It's the place where you're *not* grateful that keeps you stuck. Because I've been stuck, I've been ungrateful, I know that it's not a creative place. Once you take responsibility, it's you in charge. You've got the key to go anywhere.

I'M NOT DOWN ON MY CAREER NOW. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO CHANGE IT, YOU CAN ONLY CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE IT. IT BECOMES A GRACEFUL SWAN AS OPPOSED TO A RAGGEDY OLD BEAVER!

This is a silly question to end on, but do you ever miss the times when, as a 1983 live review of Haircut 100 in *The Guardian* had it, "Sweets and soft toys rained on the stage and the screaming continued unabated"?
Definitely not. I prefer chocolate and health food now...

Haircut 100 will appear at Glastonbury Festival this year before heading off on a tour of North America

● For full details of upcoming gigs and tours, visit haircut100.com and nickheyward.com

Madness have wasted no time in reissuing their 2023 UK No.1 album

NUTTY BOYS' CHART-TOPPER GETS EXPANDED

Madness have announced an expanded version of *Theatre Of The Absurd Presents C'est La Vie*.

The Nutty Boys' first studio album to top the UK charts was reissued on 7 June and features five new studio tracks – *I'd Do Anything (If I Could)*, *No Reason*, *Hello Sun*, *Long Goodbye* and *Culture Vulture* – all laid down during their *C'est La Vie* album sessions.

Also included on the new reissue are seven live tracks recorded during last year's C'est La Vie tour. Speaking on the album update, frontman Suggs said: "We've had a blast playing the new songs for you so thought we'd throw in some live versions, too."

Originally released on 17 November last year, the singer told *Classic Pop* at the time: "We've all stopped farting about a bit and concentrated again. So, this new record was a relatively painless process. The mad members are less mad, the sane members are less sane, and we've all met in the middle somewhere. We've collided together in a sandpit of joy."

The reissue comes in limited edition hardback book 2CD and very limited edition vinyl format available exclusively via the official store. We review the album this issue on page 94.

CHINA CRISIS IN THE PRESENCE OF GREATNESS

China Crisis have announced an extensive tour to promote their current album *China Greatness*.

Kicking off in the Philippines and Singapore, the New Wave outfit fronted by mainstays Gary Daly and Eddie Lundon return for a string of UK dates starting in Leicester on 3 August stretching all the way through to a pair of Glasgow shows on 14-15 December.

Released on 31 May, *China Greatness* features China Crisis' best-loved songs reworked in a cinematic style by three-time Grammy Award-winning engineer Mark Phythian. The album is available on double vinyl and an expanded deluxe CD.

LOST & FOUND

ALL ABOUT EVE
ALL ABOUT EVE

Few bands bettered All About Eve when it came to remaining true to their goth principles while embracing pop – and this polished, gutsy album proves it. Haunting guitars and moody rhythm sections marinate much of this self-titled debut LP, but thanks to the cool, pure vocals of Julianne Regan and some disarming melodies, it's also very much a 'goth-pop' effort – *Wild Hearted Woman*, *In The Clouds* and *Flowers In Our Hair* immaculately combine earnest lyrics with singalong melodies. *Every Angel* has sweet multi-tracked harmonies; *Never Promise (Anyone Forever)* has handclaps that could sound naff but don't; and the uplifting acoustic guitars and strings on *What Kind Of Fool*, *Gypsy Dance*, *In The Meadow* and the immortal *Martha's Harbour* – the biggest hit of their career and the gifted Regan's crowning glory as a singer – showcase the group's much-loved folksy motif.

The only whiffy moment is an idle adaptation of Irish folk song *She Moves Through The Fair* (later also remodelled by Simple Minds for *Belfast Child*), which sits uncomfortably with the rest of the record.

Six singles charted, four of which made the UK Top 40. The album added three further tracks on CD and peaked at No.7 in the UK on release in early 1988. After three more LPs they split in 1993, reforming to support labelmates The Mission on tour in 1999. They continued for five further years as a live and acoustic act.

MATTHEW RUDD

NICK HEYWARD
October 2024
18 BASINGSTOKE The Haymarket
19 BURY ST EDMUNDS The Apex
22 SUNDERLAND The Fire Station
23 SALE Waterside Arts Centre
24 LEEDS City Varieties Music Hall
26 LONDON Cadogan Hall
30 EAST GRINSTEAD Chequer Mead
31 HOVE The Old Market
November
02 STROUD The Sub Rooms
08 MILTON KEYNES The Stables SOLD OUT
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CHINA GREATNESS
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14.07 Singapore Timbre+ One North
03.08 Leicester 80's Legends Live
23.08 Liverpool Pier Head Festival
25.08 Derry Back to the 80's Festival
30.08 Stowmarket John Peel Centre
13.09 Bradford Tapestry Arts
14.09 Newcastle Cluny
15.09 Barnoldswick Music and Arts centre
26.09 Bristol Thekla
27.09 Penzance The Acorn
28.09 Tiverton Community Arts Theatre
04.10 Scarborough Scarborough Spa
05.10 Chester Live Rooms
08.10 Valencia, Spain * Repvblicca
10.10 Madrid, Spain * La Riviera
11.10 Barcelona, Spain * Razzmatazz
12.10 Malaga, Spain Roka Rock Voodoo
18.10 Lowdham Village Hall
19.10 Fletching Trading Boundaries
20.10 Southampton Engine Rooms
25.10 Wokingham The Whitty Theatre
26.10 Holborn Pizza Express
27.10 Holborn Pizza Express
01.11 Lancaster Grand Theatre
02.11 Bury The Met
07.11 Runcorn The Brindley
08.11 Cottingham Civic Hall
09.11 St Albans The Horn
14.11 Birmingham Hare and Hounds
15.11 Cardiff Acapela
16.11 Cardiff Acapela
21.11 Kirkby St Chad's Church
22.11 Derby The Flowerpot
23.11 Stockton-on-Tees Arc
29.11 Oxford 02 Academy
30.11 Taunton Computer World @ Lawns Club
06.12 Cork, Ireland Sea Church
07.12 Kerry, Ireland Mike the Pies
08.12 Dublin, Ireland Opium
10.12 Brixton ° 02 Academy
11.12 Brixton ° 02 Academy
12.12 Liverpool Cavern
13.12 Liverpool Cavern
14.12 Glasgow Òran Mór
15.12 Glasgow Òran Mór
* (w/ Big Country & Blow Monkeys)
° (w/ Vampire Weekend)
CHINA CRISIS

Ian Peel's A to Z of POP

THIS A TO Z WAS ORIGINALLY ENTITLED R IS FOR REJECTION LETTERS BUT I DECIDED TO TAKE A MORE OPTIMISTIC APPROACH AND LOOK AT HOW BEING TURNED DOWN CAN SPUR MUSICIANS ON TO EVEN GREATER HEIGHTS

D IS FOR... DON'T GIVE UP

I once wrote an *A To Z* about how in the late 70s the Robert Stigwood Organisation (RSO) literally owned the music business. Everything they touched – not least the Bee Gees and *Saturday Night Fever* – turned to gold. But they dropped the ball on 10 May 1979, penning a now infamous rejection letter to U2. "We have listened with careful consideration," they wrote, "but feel it's not suitable for us at present." Undeterred, the group were quickly snapped up by Island Records and the rest is history.

It got me thinking about the rejection letters of pop history, and the effect they had to spur artists on to great heights. While a copy of The Beatles' infamous rejection letter from Decca Records has never surfaced, you can jump online and find Millennium Records turning down Madonna as she looked for her first record deal. "The production, arrangements and she [sic] are very strong," wrote Millennium president Jimmy Lenner. "The direction is a good one in my opinion." So far so good.

However, he concluded: "The only thing missing from this project is the material. I liked *I Want You, Get Up* and *High Society* (from the singer's mythical *The Gotham Tapes* of 1981) but I did not like *Love On The Run* at all. I do not feel she is ready yet... I will pass for now."

Maybe rejection and rejection letters are all part of paying your dues as an artist. "When we first started making demos in 1987 we sent a demo tape to all the A&R dance departments of all the major labels," Deee-Lite's DJ Dmitry told *Blues & Soul* magazine when they first found fame. "We didn't get a response from any of them. One company sent us a rejection letter saying, 'Sorry, your stuff's completely unoriginal and we're not interested at the moment.' From that, we knew they hadn't even heard our tape. But that didn't discourage us..."

Trevor Horn once told me that rejection when producing Yes was what left him to create the first Art Of Noise release. "I was finishing off *90125* when I phoned up the manager of Yes," he remembered. "He told me they didn't like my mixes of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* and I went mad! I was just incandescent with rage that they wouldn't like it. But I said I'm not going to just walk out. I'm going to direct my anger into putting together *Into Battle With The Art of Noise*, editing the early tapes into a debut EP."

MAYBE REJECTION LETTERS ARE ALL PART OF PAYING YOUR DUES... TREVOR HORN ONCE TOLD ME THAT REJECTION WHEN PRODUCING YES WAS WHAT LEFT HIM TO CREATE THE FIRST ART OF NOISE RELEASE

The best twist in the tale comes from It's Immaterial co-founder Henry Priestman. When I was working for Stiff Records in the late Noughties, Henry told me how, in 1978, he'd sent a cassette to Stiff just to try to bag one of their infamous rejection letters. And it worked. The label was well known for injecting a sense of humour into the dull process of replying to unsolicited demo tapes, sending out a pre-formulated letter that closed with "Thanks for sending it in anyway, and don't give up, even though the best record company has in fact turned you down."

And Henry absolutely didn't give up. It's Immaterial became one of the coolest art pop groups of the 80s. He then formed The Christians before embarking on a solo career peaking, I would say, with the 2008 LP *The Chronicles Of Modern Life*. And the label that released it? Stiff Records. Rejected no more. ■

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SUN 09 YORK BARBICAN
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WED 12 BUXTON OPERA HOUSE
THU 13 BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
FRI 14 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL
SAT 15 LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC HALL
SUN 16 MALVERN THEATRE
TUE 18 BATH FORUM
WED 19 TORQUAY PRINCESS THEATRE
THU 20 POOLE LIGHTHOUSE
FRI 21 AYLESBURY WATERSIDE THEATRE
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SUN 28 GLASGOW OVO HYDRO
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This month in POP

JULY 1983

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE HITS THE SHOPPING AISLE, THE CLASH MAKE A SCORSESE CAMEO AND DIANA ROSS FINDS HERSELF IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

STEVE O'BRIEN

01 Bon Jovi sign to Mercury Records in the United States. The group, headed up by singer Jon Bon Jovi, will become one of the defining rock outfits of the decade.

02 Rod Stewart starts a three-week run at No.1 with *Baby Jane*, his biggest success since 1978's *Da Ya Think I'm Sexy* and his last single – to date – to top the UK charts.

07 Martin Scorsese's movie *The King Of Comedy* is released in Australia. The film includes cameo appearances from three members of The Clash – Mick Jones, Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon.

14 REM's debut album *Murmur* enters the US Billboard chart where it peaks at No.36. (The LP doesn't chart in the UK until 1994, where it hit No.100). A re-release of debut single *Radio Free Europe* would make No.25 soon after.

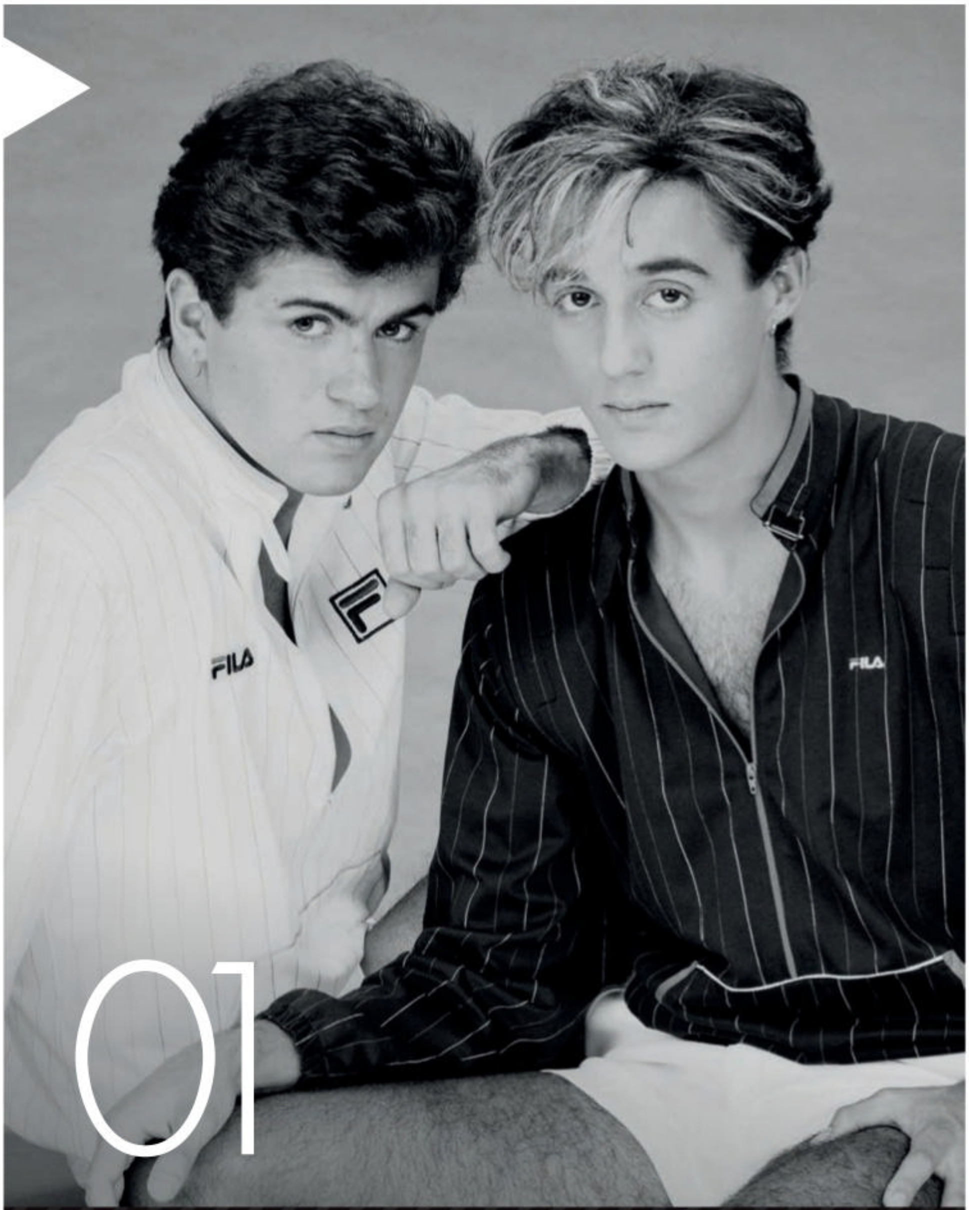
06 Jean-Michel Jarre's album *Musique Pour Supermarché* (Music For Supermarkets), of which only one copy was ever pressed, is sold at auction for 69,000 francs.

09 The Police begin an eight-week run at No.1 on the Billboard Hot 100 with *Every Breath You Take*. The track would later win Song of the Year at the 1984 Grammy Awards.

21 Diana Ross performs at New York's Central Park, a concert that lasted 45 minutes before being cut short due to a massive lightning storm. The performance – what there is of it – is aired on TV as *For One And For All*.

12 Former Traffic member Chris Wood dies of liver failure aged just 39. During his career he also performed with Jimi Hendrix (appearing on the 1968 album *Electric Ladyland*), Dr John and Nick Drake.

23 Paul Young enjoys his first UK No.1 single with his version of the Marvin Gaye classic *Wherever I Lay My Hat (That's My Home)*.



01

Wham!'s debut album, *Fantastic*, was released via Innervision on 1 July. The group – consisting of George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley – had put out three singles in *Young Guns (Go For It)* (UK No.3), *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)* (UK No.8) and *Bad Boys* (UK No.2), so their first full-length offering was eagerly anticipated in the summer of 1983. The LP contained just eight tracks, of which Michael was the sole writer of five (*Wham Rap!* and *Club Tropicana* were George/Andrew co-writes and *Love Machine*, a cover of a 1975 single by Motown group The Miracles).

Club Tropicana was released as the album's fourth and final single, a few weeks after the album dropped, and gave the band another Top 5 hit. The LP itself would go on to peak at No.83 in the United States (spending 44 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100) and go Top 10 in Australia, Germany, Finland, Norway and New Zealand, where it reached No.1.

Fantastic would spend a grand total of 116 weeks in the UK Top 100.

To promote the album, George and Andrew embarked on a 30-date tour in October 1983. The Fantastic Tour (sponsored by Fila sportswear) would take in such cities as Aberdeen, Liverpool, Bristol and Swansea and see the group supported by DJ Gary Crowley. It also saw the introduction of Pepsi DeMacque and Shirlie Holliman to Wham!, who sang all the parts originally sung on the record by Dee C. Lee, who left the group to join The Style Council shortly after the album's release. "The tour was chaos," Holliman told *Classic Pop* in 2015. "All these screaming fans wanting to get in with George and Andrew. They'd ask Pepsi and I to pass on messages for them with their phone numbers and underwear attached. But it didn't work."

While *Fantastic* received mixed reviews at the time, 41 years on, it's seen as one of 1983's defining records and among the greatest debuts in pop. Critics, eh?

TOP 5 UK ALBUMS CHART

3 JULY 1983

1 **FANTASTIC**
WHAM!

2 **SYNCHRONICITY**
THE POLICE

3 **THRILLER**
MICHAEL JACKSON

4 **LET'S DANCE**
DAVID BOWIE

5 **BODY WISHES**
ROD STEWART

"I LIKE EVERYTHING I DO TO BE AN ADVENTURE"

ALONGSIDE SOFT CELL SUDDENLY BECOMING A WORKING BAND AGAIN, MARC ALMOND'S PERSONAL LIFE HAS WITNESSED MAJOR CHANGES RECENTLY, TOO. AFTER 40 YEARS IN LONDON, MARC HAS MOVED TO THE PORTUGUESE COUNTRYSIDE. IT'S REVIVED HIS LOVE OF MUSIC – LEADING TO A NEW COVERS ALBUM FROM A SINGER WHO INSISTS THAT HE'S NOT THAT BIG A DEAL AS A SONGWRITER. *CLASSIC POP* ASKS MARC HOW THE MAN WHO WROTE *SAY HELLO WAVE GOODBYE* CAN BE SO MODEST ABOUT HIS TALENTS...

JOHN EARLS

Although Marc Almond and Dave Ball grew up in Southport and Blackpool respectively before meeting at Leeds Polytechnic in 1977, Soft Cell are arguably a London band: both men moved to the capital as soon as they could and remained there for decades afterwards.

While their debut album *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret* isn't exactly a London concept record, it captures the sound of pre-gentrification Soho better than anyone else. Seamy songs like *Youth*, *Sex Dwarf* and *Seedy Films* drip with the danger and illicit sex of the city in the 1980s.

For the remainder of Soft Cell's first incarnation, and his even murkier 80s alter-ego in Marc And The Mambas, Almond lived opposite infamous Soho strip club Raymond Revuebar. For Soft Cell, success only meant finding nicer homes in London, rather than suburban retreats or country mansions. Indeed, their second split, after *Cruelty Without Beauty* in the early Noughties, was precipitated by a row after bumping into each other in the streets of central London.

WAVE GOODBYE

Classic Pop meets Almond to discuss his adventurous new covers album *I'm Not Anyone* at Soho Hotel. It's a five-star hangout that's exactly as luxurious as anyone would imagine successful 80s pop stars would conduct all their interviews, but it's also just two minutes' walk from the site of Raymond Revuebar. For gentrification in action, have a look at the prices of Soho Hotel's cocktail menu.

So far, so London. But Marc Almond lives nowhere near here anymore. Shortly after recovering from Covid, which he contracted at the start of lockdown, the seemingly lifetime Londoner moved to Portugal.

"When I came out of Covid, I felt so drained and exhausted," begins Marc of his European adventure. "I felt aged, and I just felt *ill*. Of course, so many people felt that way who have been through Covid, but it maybe didn't hit me until later. I realised that I was mentally and physically exhausted. And I don't love London like I used to."

While Marc has always been attentive in person, keen to ensure any interviewer

From Raymond Revuebar in the heart of Soho to the "middle of nowhere" in the Portuguese countryside, Almond remains a "cultural animal"

"I like to think that I'm bringing a song in a new light to my audience who might not have heard it before"
Marc Almond

© Nick Spanos

"I bought a plot of unloved rural land, with an unloved wreck of a house. I wanted a project. I can plant orange and lemon trees, then retreat there when the apocalypse comes."
Marc Almond

2017's 60s-era pop covers album *Shadows And Reflections* reached No.14 in the UK Albums Chart

has all the drinks and hotel nibbles he can offer, he's never looked happier than he does now – he really does seem revived by the Portuguese countryside. By contrast, the cleaned-up, pricier London just isn't the city to offer the adventure it did in 1981. "I'm sure I'll fall in love with London again," considers Almond. "Right now, though, it feels like an ex-lover. It's going through a weird patch."

Marc's feelings toward the capital were made clear in *London You Were My Lover* from the singer's joint album in 2018 with Jools Holland, *A Lovely Life To Live*: "I'm willing to give you another chance/ If you dress just like you did before." "That's how I feel about London and the UK in general at the moment," laughs Almond. "London needs to get its party dress on again. I needed an adventure. I'm getting older and I thought: 'This can't be it, can it?'"

Post-Brexit, Portugal was the only EU country to offer an escape, with a special visa on offer for British artists and musicians to live there. It's since been withdrawn, after pressure from the rest of the EU, as Marc admits: "I got to Portugal just in time. The only other country to offer a similar deal was Dubai." He looks faintly appalled. "I couldn't think of anything worse than Dubai. I don't like the heat much. It's hard enough in Portugal, but Dubai is literally a cultural desert, whereas Portugal interested me. I like fado music, so that was a plus straight away."

After so long surrounded by people in London, Almond's new home is a solitary contrast, as he reveals: "I bought a plot of unloved rural land, with an unloved wreck of a house. I wanted a project. I can plant orange and lemon trees, then retreat there when the apocalypse comes. I love getting back to nature, and my new place is in the middle of nowhere, with solar panels."

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

A decade ago, Marc made his love of nature explicit on the environmentally themed *The Tyburn Tree,* his album with composer John Harle. He also spoke to *Classic Pop* in 2019 about studying to be a druid. "Exactly," he grins, when reminded of his studies. "I'm living a rural life as a pagan druid. It's good for

Marc Almond's solo career now stretches out to an impressive 27 studio albums

"LONDON NEEDS TO GET ITS PARTY DRESS ON AGAIN. I NEEDED AN ADVENTURE. I'M GETTING OLDER AND I THOUGHT: 'THIS CAN'T BE IT, CAN IT?'"

my soul, as well as somewhere I can be when the world goes to hell."

The pagan life doesn't mean Almond has entirely abandoned his old pursuits. "I do get homesick," he admits. "I'm a cultural animal. My itinerary in London for the 10 days I'm back here is packed, seeing this show and that exhibition. It's a trip full of *stuff*. When I get back to Portugal, I will probably just plant trees, then sit in front of YouTube going down rabbit holes."

Those YouTube rabbit holes, coupled with the tranquillity of Portugal, helped inspire Marc to revisit his record collection for his first covers set since 2017's *Shadows And Reflections*. "My rural life in Portugal is why this album has so many elemental references," he ponders. "I wanted to get back to a spiritual feeling in my music. It sounds corny to say it, but there's a spirituality to this album."

Having been so busy since Soft Cell unexpectedly made a new album with *Happiness Not Included* returning them to the Top 10 two years ago, Almond was exhausted with music, too. "I have to reconnect with music from time to time," he smiles. "I had time to do that at home, and my favourite way to reconnect is to rediscover songs I liked from years ago. When I am getting back into them, watching their old videos on YouTube sends me down rabbit holes of info about other songs to explore. This time, I wanted songs that hit me emotionally."

Almond photographed by Mike Owen, who has another shot of Marc in the National Portrait Gallery

ANYONE'S GAME

The title track, originally a duet by Paul Anka with Sammy Davis Jr written in 1973, was the first song to be chosen. "I love the title of the song – and my album as a result – because it can mean 'I'm a nobody' or 'I'm not just anyone'," smiles Marc. "It's not until the second line, 'I'm not just anyone', that you get your answer. It's a great title and such a big song."

Almond had intended to recreate the original's duet feel with his regular backing singer, Brian Chambers, but album producer Mike Stevens pushed Marc to record it solo instead. "I thought I could hide behind Brian," he confesses. "Mike told me: 'There's no hiding, this is one to do on your own' and he was absolutely right. *I'm Not Anyone* is a song that very much says how I feel. I find it hard to get to the end of it without feeling choked up. It's about defiance, and I've always been defiant."

Since emerging into the mainstream with *Tainted Love* 43 years ago, Almond has always presented his music the way he wants, whether wearing riotously gay

CROWN JOOLS

Following his own solo tour in September, Marc Almond heads out as the guest vocalist on old friend Jools Holland's run of dates starting on 31 October.

Marc has sung regularly with the former Squeeze keyboardist's Rhythm And Blues Orchestra over the past decade. He explains: "Playing with Jools is nice, because it's not a massive strain, and I get to see parts of Britain I never usually go to. I'm singing to an audience that I don't usually sing to. Jools' audience isn't usually my hardcore fans, so it's a nice change."

Although not fronting a show is a more relaxed experience for Almond, it still keeps his vocals in great shape. "Jools' tour will be good for me," he reasons. "Being onstage is a muscle you have to exercise, in order to keep it going. I can catch my breath when I'm not onstage at his shows, and I like being part of an ensemble, where it's not all resting on my shoulders."

Popping backstage mid-show isn't such an unusual experience, as Marc jokes: "It's like Charlie Watts said: your music career is one year of doing work and 45 years sitting around waiting. The Jools tour will be a working holiday, really. I get to see some more of Britain, without having the pressure."

For *I'm Not Anyone*'s tracklist, Almond takes on everyone from Don McLean to Mahalia Jackson

costumes on *Top Of The Pops,* veering off into music that's not so much underground as subterranean with Genesis P-Orridge, Coil and assorted other avant-garde experimentalists, or happily chatting away to Gloria Hunniford or Lorraine Kelly. Marc is surely our only pop star equally at home with Psychic TV or daytime TV.

"I have a way of seeing things and how to do them," he shrugs. "No one can tell me what to do or try to manipulate me. At times, that's got me a reputation: 'Marc Almond is difficult.' People who work with me know I'm not difficult. But you can't manufacture me, and it's one reason why *I'm Not Anyone* is such an important song for me."

The variety of Marc's music is testament to how he's happy to get involved in so many different spheres, rather than having any rigid formula he insists on being followed. But there are limits. "I like everything I do to be an adventure," he states. "That's why I do lots of different things. Whether it's singing Brecht & Weill songs or working with some esoteric artist, so long as it fits in my world somewhere then I'll do it. If I can get inside a project, I'll do it. I never think: 'This isn't commercial enough.' I never worry if it'll make me any money."

Asked if he's ever thought about the financial implications for his career, Almond laughs delightedly, as if asked if he's ever considered being a cage fighter. "If I was to think in those terms, I'd take one of the huge offers I get from *The Masked Singer.*" Oh, really? The Saturday night show has been one of ITV's biggest entertainment hits since *Britain's Got Talent,* with Gabrielle and Kaiser Chiefs' Ricky Wilson among its previous singers. But it's not one for Almond. "The sums are life-changing: very, *very* nice offers," he shares. "It's a s-load of money." He really does self-censor saying "shit", which is adorable for anyone who's heard Marc And The Mambas' *Torment And Toreros* album. "It's just not for me. I'm not rich, but my records have let me be able to live the life I want to live, so I don't need to

Indulging his love of all things pagan and druid, Marc's new album explores the elemental and living world

© Nick Spanos

"I HAVE A WAY OF SEEING THINGS AND HOW TO DO THEM. NO ONE CAN TELL ME WHAT TO DO OR TRY TO MANIPULATE ME. AT TIMES, THAT'S GOT ME A REPUTATION."

do *The Masked Singer.* I'm not putting the show down. It's always flattering to be asked, I'm just not very good at being that kind of entertainer."

It's a demonstration of how Marc is happy to do almost anything, so long as it's on his terms. "I'm not disparaging of how people view me in different ways," he insists. "I can be entertaining in my own world, in my own way – whatever that is. But I'm not a goodtime, jazz hands entertainer." Almond offers his best showtunes jazz hands impression. Readers, it is endearingly *rubbish.*

Almond recently showed off his artwork at the Deities & Demons exhibition in Soho

COVERED IN GLORY

Something else Marc doesn't necessarily think he's expert at is writing songs. *I'm Not Anyone* is his eighth covers album since he branched out into interpreting others' material on Jacques Brel tribute record *Jacques* in 1989. He can obviously tackle a variety of others' work, but is disarmingly frank about his reasons for doing so.

"I've never thought of myself as a songwriter," says Almond, as *CP* looks at him like he's grown a second head. "I've written loads of songs, of course, but I've never looked at myself in that way. I've tried writing songs for other people. Every time I've tried, it's been a disaster. I can only write songs that work for me."

Of course, both of Marc's No.1 singles, *Tainted Love* and *Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart,* were covers. Does it matter

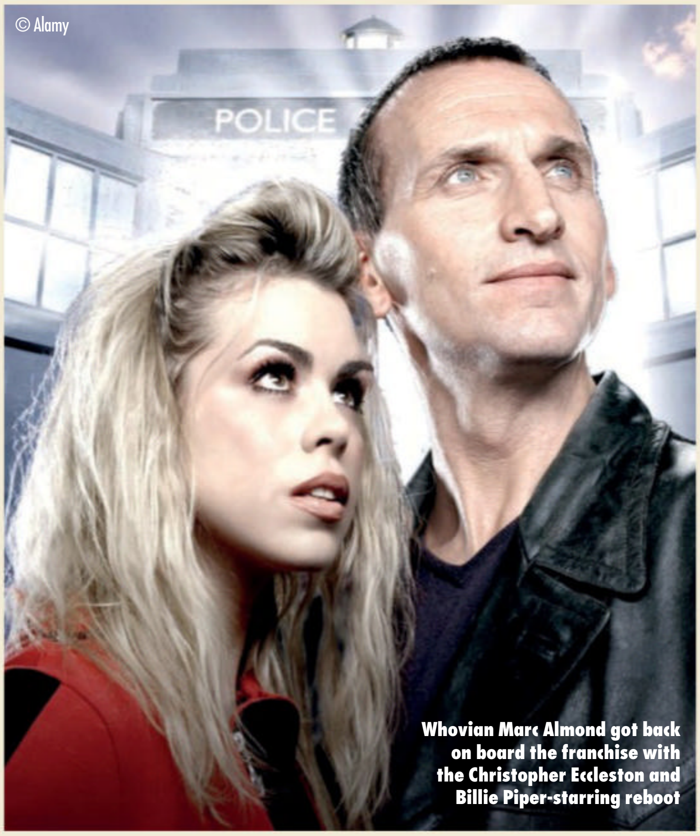
TARDIS LOVE

On a recent set visit to *Doctor Who*'s studio in Cardiff for *Doctor Who Magazine*, *CP* contributor Paul Kirkley reported on the singles that the Time Lord houses on the jukebox in his Tardis. These include *Tainted Love*, as well as artists including Scissor Sisters and Britney Spears.

This delights Marc Almond, a Whovian since seeing the show's very first episode in 1963 at his aunt's house when he was six. Treating us to his rendition of Delia Derbyshire's classic theme, Marc recalls: "Once the 'Wooo-ee-oooh' music came on, with the slightly fuzzy special effects of the title sequence, I was transported."

Although he stopped watching during Tom Baker's tenure, Almond explains: "I'll always have a love for *Doctor Who*. As a child, I'd do drawings of the show and made a Tardis out of cardboard boxes that I painted blue. I'd sit inside it, imagining it was bigger on the inside, like the Doctor's Tardis."

Marc began watching the series again when it was rebooted with Christopher Eccleston as the Doctor in 2005. *Tainted Love* was heavily featured in Eccleston's story *The End Of The World*: "I thought Christopher was fantastic as the Doctor, and *Tainted Love* being on the show was *Doctor Who* nirvana." On being informed Soft Cell's chart-topper travels with the current Doctor, Ncuti Gatwa, in his jukebox, Marc exclaims: "Is it really? That's fantastic! How incredible, that's such an honour."



© Alamy

Whovian Marc Almond got back on board the franchise with the Christopher Eccleston and Billie Piper-starring reboot

that none of his own songs have reached the top? "Not at all," he responds convincingly. "I've been lucky to have had any No.1 singles, let alone two. The fact that they're covers, who cares? A song is a song." He laughs at the memory of *Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart*'s unexpected success in 1988: "I rang my marketing manager and told him: 'You have to stop letting this record be at No.1. I can't go out! Can you do something so that it drops down the chart?'" Another laugh. "I'm aware of how that sounds – an artist requesting his record company to drop *down* the charts, just so he can live a life."

Of the artists to cover Almond's songs, David Gray's version of *Say Hello Wave Goodbye* is the most successful. Despite being the fifth single from his multi-platinum 1998 album *White Ladder*, it still reached the Top 30. "Even though it's just David and an acoustic guitar, his version is completely epic," raves Marc. "He somehow turned it into a nine-minute anthem. I was very grateful to David, and I've happily sung it onstage with him a few times. But my favourite version of *Say Hello Wave Goodbye* is by a-ha. I love their music and Morten Harket is such a fantastic singer. A-ha only did their version for a radio session, but I was thrilled they did it at all."

Asked which other of his songs he'd like covered, Marc immediately plumps for *Torch* – "Probably my favourite Soft Cell single" – and *Brilliant Creatures*, from 1996's recently reissued *Fantastic Star*: "That could make for a really nice version by someone."

Gene Pitney and Marc sing *Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart* on German TV in 1989

LOW PROFILE

If Almond is uncertain of his songwriting talents, he's more confident about his singing ability, but in the studio he needs a producer he can feel comfortable with. Marc's near-fatal motorcycle crash 20 years ago has left him partially deaf in his right ear. "My eardrum was pierced in the accident," recalls Almond. "It healed, but it's never been the same again. I can't hear high sounds anymore, only bass sounds, so onstage everything has to be bass sounds.

"In the studio, there's nothing worse than when someone can't get the mics to sound right. If I have to stop because I can't hear myself or I can't get the right pitch, I just can't do it. That's stressful, and it means there are only a certain few people that I like to work with."

As well as Mike Stevens, Marc names Trevor Horn and recent solo producer Chris Braide as his favourites. Mike, who has also worked with Take That and Annie Lennox, is good at making him feel relaxed. "Mike pushes me, but he doesn't bully

Soft Cell's 2022 fifth album **Happiness Not Included* was their first LP in two decades

or intimidate me," says Almond. "I like someone I can have a laugh with. We'll spend half the session gossiping and talking about what records we like, then it's: 'Oh, we'd better do some music.'"

Their only regular difference of opinion is that Mike sometimes attempts to get Marc to do vocal harmonies: "I try to do harmonies, but I just can't figure them out. I'm useless at harmonies. I tried doing them in early Soft Cell and they're the worst harmonies in the world, all over the place. I listen back to them now and think: 'What was I *doing*?' That was the sound of the time, I guess."

NON-STOP OPERATION

Soft Cell's past was recently expanded with last year's deluxe 6CD boxset of *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret*. Further boxsets of *The Art Of Falling Apart* and *This Last Night In Sodom* have been teased on the duo's social media – but Almond won't be getting involved directly. He understands that fans love them but, again, it's just not for Marc. "I don't get involved in that side," he admits. "I know the fans want to hear all our demos that have been under the bed from 40 years ago. That's fine, but I don't listen to them.

"Going back to listen to those early versions with a half-finished vocal would do my head in. When someone says there's a boxset with five different versions of *Say Hello Wave Goodbye*, it drives me crazy. I totally understand collectors want that, but it's not for me."

Despite Almond's reticence over his own catalogue, he cheerfully admits that he's a hypocrite over the collecting mindset as he reveals: "Oh, I'll buy anything Marc Bolan ever did. Me and Chris Braide are both obsessive about Marc. I'll listen to him strumming away in the studio, stopping halfway through to ask: 'Can I have a cup of tea, please?' Chris and I buy all the Bolan boxsets, and we've bought T-Rex singles we already own just for a different cover. I know Soft Cell fans are like that, too."

Following the success of **Happiness Not Included*, Almond is much cheerier about Soft Cell's current status: "That album kept the spirit of Soft Cell alive and was us being true to ourselves. It was a very Soft Cell record – unlike *Cruelty Without Beauty*, which never really felt like a Soft Cell album."

Marc plays ChillFest in Tring on 6 July before his UK tour, with further shows in Dublin and Germany

© Nick Spanos

"THERE ARE WHISPERINGS ABOUT DOING ANOTHER NEW [SOFT CELL] ALBUM BUT IT WOULD HAVE TO GO IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTION."

© Andrew Whitton

The concern over Soft Cell's future is Dave Ball's health. The keyboardist is confined to a wheelchair after breaking his back in an accident at home just before **Happiness Not Included* was released. The album's co-producer, Philip Larsen, deputises for Ball at live shows when the keyboardist is unable to travel.

"Dave is extremely ill," frets Marc. "He can't always be part of our live show. We're only doing one UK show this year,

***"So long as Dave is involved, then whatever we do will be Soft Cell. If Dave isn't involved it's not Soft Cell."* Marc Almond**

"WICKED AND MISCHIEVOUS"

I'm Not Anyone isn't the only covers album Almond has been involved with recently: he also co-produced veteran blues singer Dana Gillespie's latest LP *First Love* with Marc's regular associate, Tris Penna. Dana's song *Stardom Road* was the title track of Almond's 2007 album. Marc enthuses: "Dana is one of the last great bohemian ladies of rock, who's made about 70 albums. She mostly makes quite dirty blues, and I said to Tris: 'We've got to do something with her, but a more pop-based album."

First Love covers everyone from Green Day to Lana Del Rey. "Even now, Dana's pitch is great," says Almond. "The way she sings Morrissey's song *Spent The Day In Bed* is wicked and mischievous."

That was the album's first single, as Marc explains: "I know Morrissey is controversial, but he just writes great songs. He sent a very nice note saying how much he loves the record – he really gets it, and it was nice to have his sanction."

One of the most surprising covers is of Jake Bugg's *Simple As This*, from the young singer-songwriter's self-titled 2012 debut album. "I think Jake Bugg is fantastic," says Almond. "I've loved him since I first saw him on BBC2's Glastonbury coverage when he was 17. When we were recording *Simple As This* at Dean Street Studio in Soho, Jake was in another studio there at the same time. I kicked myself when I learned that afterwards, as I'd have loved to ask Jake to come in and sing with Dana or play some guitar."

● **Dana Gillespie's *First Love* is reviewed on page 83**

© Christina Jansen

at Blenheim Palace on 14 June, and as it stands Dave will be there. I feel I can do Soft Cell's music live without Dave. Very few bands now, especially from the 80s, have all their original members. It's become just a brand name for them. But I do worry people will be so disappointed if Dave isn't there. Most of the time, I think they're not, as it's a very good show visually, and Philip is a good stand-in."

SOFT RETURN

A new LP is a different matter. Marc is reluctant to completely commit himself to saying there will definitely be a sixth Soft Cell album, but he confirms: "There are whisperings about doing another one. But a new album would have to go in a completely different direction."

Considering the three 1980s Soft Cell albums are totally separate from each other, that shouldn't be a problem. Marc's face lights up when this is put to him. "I absolutely agree with that," he beams. "So long as Dave is heavily involved, then whatever we do will be Soft Cell. Dave is at the heart of Soft Cell, and I'll only do Soft Cell if Dave is involved in a major way. If Dave isn't involved in our music, it's not Soft Cell."

There's an intriguing clue as to what could be next when Almond is asked what a new LP could sound like. "You're right that those first three records give us licence to take Soft Cell somewhere else," Marc reflects. "We've twice gone 17 years without doing an album. With those big gaps, you are conscious of not letting the fans down when

© Tina Korhonen

Songwriter and producer Chris Braide pushed the singer to make "the ultimate Marc Almond album" for 2015's *The Velvet Trail*

you return, while also not being a parody of yourself – and I know the fans always want more *Bedsitter* or *Tainted Love*.

"But Soft Cell originally came from Black music: *Tainted Love*, obviously, while *Memorabilia* was based on a James Brown riff. We loved Northern Soul and Motown, and I'd like to do something that's more obviously in that world. I'd maybe like to work with an R&B producer, someone who has an understanding of that heritage. That would be something interesting to work into Soft Cell."

Quite when Almond could find the time for Soft Cell 6 is another matter. He hints at a couple of projects he can't yet talk about, while confirming he wants to make another solo album of new songs with Chris Braide, stating: "When I do a record like *I'm Not Anyone*, it inspires me to start writing again. I've written lots of various bits of lyrics. I'm sure there'll be another album with Chris, and I love collaborating, as that takes me out of my bubble. I can get lost in my own universe – I need to get out of that."

Marc semi-jokes that he'd love to have a cameo in a musical – "I'd like to do a show in a few years where I can hobble on, do one show-stealing song then hobble off home again" – but ultimately he hopes to emulate one of his heroes, Charles Aznavour, whose songs *What Makes A Man* and *I Have Lived* are among Almond's covers.

"Charles Aznavour was still performing when he was 93," smiles Marc. "I have an image of seeing him onstage, looking at 10 different teleprompters, so he could sing in Spanish, English, French, Armenian... He'd hobble on but, within 10 minutes, he looked *young*. That's what music did to him. I'd love to retreat into the countryside, coming out to make the occasional appearance in half-shadow before giving up again. If I can be onstage at 93, the old age melting away once I start singing... wouldn't that be great?"

● **Marc Almond's new album *I'm Not Anyone* is released on 12 July via BMG and reviewed on page 81. He tours the UK from 8-22 September. For full details, visit marcalmond.co.uk.**

CLASSIC ALBUM

IT'S MY LIFE
TALK TALK

INITIALLY IGNORED IN THE UK, THE CULT BAND'S SECOND ALBUM MARKED THE FIRST SIGNS OF A SHIFTING TRAJECTORY. BUT IT STANDS UP ON ITS OWN MERITS AS A FINE SYNTH-POP RECORD.

FELIX ROWE

Throughout life, there's often a disconnect between the perception and the reality: where you are, versus where you want to be. This uneasy tension framed the career trajectory of Talk Talk in their formative years. Long before the critical plaudits and mythologising, they were largely dismissed as apologetic synth-pop also-rans. For all the talk talk, could they walk walk? From their early output alone, frontman Mark Hollis' frequent allusions to John Coltrane and Debussy don't immediately ring true.

What Hollis really stood for remains a fascination today, one that's accentuated by his later self-imposed exile from the limelight. 40 years on from 1984's international breakthrough, *It's My Life*, and some five years after his passing, the mystique surrounding him only grows more impenetrable in the void he left behind. But while it's the later post-rock masterpieces that prompt uncontrollable gushing from A-list fans (Robert Plant to Bon Iver), there's plenty to savour in *It's My Life*.

Like so many of their contemporaries, Talk Talk were initially presented as the next Duran Duran, before turning out to be a different beast entirely. Judging by their 1982 debut, *The Party's Over*, it's not hard to see how the comparisons arose. Riding the wake of the Fab Five's second coming, it stemmed from the same record company, and the very same producer, Colin Thurston (in the words of Duran's John Taylor, "a major catalyst for the 80s sound"). Cue soaring choruses laced with melodrama, bright synths and driving rock drums. Oh – and crisp white suits.

The likeness was not incidental, but carefully choreographed by EMI's A&R machine, even if the young group might claim not to have got the memo. "I get depressed about the whole thing," Hollis told *Noise!*. He may have had other plans, but the only element marking out Talk Talk's arty intentions at this point (besides the snarky, anti-glam title) was the kooky sleeve by James Marsh. The antithesis of the Duran debut's smouldering fashion shoot cover art, it opted for a whimsical painting owing more to surrealists Max Ernst and Salvador Dali.

A DESIGN FOR LIFE

Talk Talk's second LP, *It's My Life*, marks the first palpable shift in their musical trajectory. While ultimately a conventional pop record, again prepared under the watchful eye of the label, it nonetheless represents a conscious expansion of their sound. But it's a subtle progression rather than radical departure, brought about through the introduction of more acoustic instruments, sophisticated chord

All Talk: (L-R) Paul Webb, Mark Hollis and Lee Harris pictured in Vondelpark, Amsterdam, August 1984

sequences, and arrangements allowing greater space for each part to breathe.

Keen to distance himself from the ubiquitous electro-pop, Hollis saw synths as a necessary evil, begrudgingly tolerating their presence as a proxy for the orchestral instruments he couldn't yet afford. "I hate the instrument", he protested (perhaps too much) to *Oor* magazine, "especially when it turns into that 'squeaky bonk plinky fumble'." Flippant or not, the claim appears particularly disingenuous when this album is laced with them. Therein lies the issue: certainly at this point, the rhetoric doesn't match the reality.

Nevertheless, with their original synth player Simon Brenner jettisoned after touring the first record, this heralded a move away from the traditional four-piece set-up, towards a selective use of instrumentation, as befit each track. As Hollis biographer, Ben Wardle, puts it in *A Perfect Silence*, "Now that the band was whittled down to a core trio, Hollis could bring in musicians to add colour without having to deal with the politics of finding them something to do in every song."

IT'S MY LIFE MARKS THE FIRST PALPABLE SHIFT IN TALK TALK'S MUSICAL TRAJECTORY. WHILE ULTIMATELY A CONVENTIONAL POP RECORD, IT NONETHELESS REPRESENTS A CONSCIOUS EXPANSION OF THEIR SOUND.

It's the beginnings of Hollis the auteur, assuming greater control over Talk Talk's aesthetic, attempting to close the gulf between the vision and the status quo. But in 1983, for all his professed love of Bartók and Miles Davis, he lacked the musical language to fully bring that vision into fruition.

A new catalyst was Jamaican British pianist, Phil Ramocon, who shared Hollis' love of jazz, and opened up his approach to songwriting with exciting chord transitions and novel key changes.

1 DUM DUM GIRL

The album opens on an acoustic piano riff, complete with fluttery flute sounds and percussion instruments, laying a foundation of interesting textures, before segueing into the more standard instrumentation. From here, it's back to business as usual, with synths set to a driving 4/4 beat and Webb's bass upfront in the mix. Until, that is, they adopt a subversive trick, so favoured by the Pixies, going full throttle in the pre-chorus bridge before dropping it down to an almost 'anti-chorus', stripping it right back once more for the main "Dum Dum Girl" refrain. Here, the vocal delivery resembles a revolving monastic chant at odds with the lyrical imagery. The title is a sly nod to Iggy Pop's *Dum Dum Boys* (which incidentally also inspired the similarly named, band Dum Dum Girls). This would be the third (and least successful) single from the LP.

2 SUCH A SHAME

Lyrically, this early highlight takes its premise from Hollis' favourite book, *The Dice Man* by Luke Rhinehart (a dark cult classic in the vein of *A Clockwork Orange* or *Crash*). The book presents the account of a psychiatrist who makes life decisions based purely on the roll of a dice, with often extremely disturbing consequences. Echoing Brian Eno's fabled 'Oblique Strategies' cards, Hollis apparently deployed the dice technique himself in writing the lyrics, picking phrases from pieces of paper based on the number he rolled. Hollis' love of jazz is subtly infused into the rock template, via some particularly muddy piano stabs in the verses. The album's second single, it didn't land in the UK, stalling at No.49. Conversely, it was a huge hit across Europe, helping to cement Talk Talk's career on the continent, going to No.1 in Switzerland, while just missing out on the top spot in West Germany. It had an extra boost following Hollis' death, reaching the Top 5 digital sales chart in France. Testament to its ongoing popularity in Europe, it was later covered by German pop artist, Sandra, in 2002, and Belgian star, An Pierlé, in 2013.

3 RENÉE

The opening rhythm, though played acoustically on world percussion, assumes the character of an industrial electro drum loop à la Depeche Mode, before chiming arpeggiated chords come in alongside Webb's rubbery fretless bass. It's one of the more tender moments on the record, Hollis' pleading vocal laced with something that resembles longing or regret. It's also the longest track on the album, stretching well over six minutes. The muted trumpet in the breakdown adds a vaguely jazzy undertone, before bringing it back up a notch for the final chorus, then gently fading out into nothingness.

4 IT'S MY LIFE

For many casual observer, this is the obvious entry point into Talk Talk's canon; an accessible gateway into a varied landscape. From the opening notes onwards, it's life-affirmingly wonderful; propelled along by Webb's throbbing bassline, weaving in and out over washing synths, while Hollis croons sweetly over the top. But its apparent simplicity belies a modulating chord progression that's more complex than it first appears, demonstrating Hollis' evolution as a songwriter. While today, it's an instantly recognisable staple of British classic radio, it didn't land the first, or even second, time round. Only third time lucky, when it was re-released in 1990 to promote a greatest hits compilation, did it chart at a respectable No.13 (amazingly their highest UK single position). It had a new lease of life in 2003, when No Doubt covered it for their own Greatest Hits (reaching No.1 in the Czech Republic and Poland, with plenty of Top 10 showings elsewhere), helping them to reach a whole new generation and inviting reappraisal on home turf.

5 TOMORROW STARTED

Opening with a repeated drum pattern and acoustic guitar chords, a simple descending synth lead line comes in. Like *Renée* it's another slow, melancholic track with a hypnotic and unsettling post-apocalyptic feel, and lots of space in the arrangement for Hollis' croon. His long, drawn-out notes over washy synths are punctuated by syncopated stabs, once more, highlighting some exquisite fretless bass work from Paul Webb. The track is elevated from potential drudgery by the atonal free-jazz trumpet solo in the final third, a sonic bolt from the blue that hints at what's to come. It's one of the tracks that most resembles Depeche Mode in the vocal refrain and the cold, sparse production. Talk Talk at their most understatedly beautiful.

6 THE LAST TIME

Opening with a bouncy beat and a wonderful nagging synth riff, *The Last Time* carries all the hallmarks of a potential hit single. But then it never really delivers the soaring chorus it seems to be building up to. That's not a problem because the smooth, understated refrain is equally effective, albeit in a more reserved fashion – like the audio equivalent of basking in the evening sun in the last days of teenage summer. It's a subtle and touching moment, that leaves a lingering sense of warmth, long after the gradual fade-out.

7 CALL IN THE NIGHT BOY

One of the earlier compositions here, *Call In The Night Boy* was originally developed as a stripped-back piano arrangement, between Hollis and Phil Ramocon. It was one of the first examples of Hollis' modulating keys, and Ramocon's playing on the demo brings a jazzy feel, showing a clear taste of the future. If only the powers that be had the guts to put this version out. Alas, clearly it was too much, and it languished as a B-side, only to resurface on 1998's *Asides Besides* several years later. The 'definitive' version included here is a different thing entirely – an upbeat, amped-up rocker, complete with classic 80s drivetime guitar (or fuzzed-up synth?). Nonetheless, it retains some lovely, avant-garde piano and strange atonal tuned percussion parts that show flirtations with the jazz leanings that Hollis would rate so much.

8 DOES CAROLINE KNOW?

Although a foray into world music, opening with bongos then a plinky plonky electric keyboard sound, on first listen *Does Caroline Know?* comes off unmistakably like elevator muzak. Surrounded by melancholy on all sides, this particular track has such an uncharacteristically upbeat bouncy jauntiness, that it's hard to tell whether or not it's an in-joke. On initial impression, it's the flimsiest track on the record, like a curio B-side. But then every album needs one of these, and its lightness of touch provides a necessary departure from the heavier tone elsewhere. The wobbly, otherworldly space-age synths sound like Bernie Worrell's contribution's to Talking Heads' recent album, *Speaking In Tongues*. The track makes more sense in a live environment, with organic textures given space to breathe. Many fans regard the live recordings to be the superior iterations of this track (check out the September 1984 version from Rotterdam available online). The epic 'guitar' solo is actually performed by Ian Curnow on synthesizer, while Ramocon provides wonderful off-the-wall piano. One has to wonder whether the title is a cheeky response to Brian Wilson's *Caroline, No* from *Pet Sounds* (which in turn was originally titled *Carol I Know*).

9 IT'S YOU

For the album's closing song, it's back to business with a driving 4/4 beat, sharing accents in a similar vein to *It's My Life*, but set against a jauntier backing track. Some interesting synth flourishes and drum accents combine to push the track forward, but really, this feels like Talk Talk on autopilot. While there's nothing particular to fault, nor is there anything of particular merit that hasn't been achieved better elsewhere on the record. It's not bad, but it's a little generic and the hook is neither sharp nor strong enough to latch on.

Interviewed in Wardle's *A Perfect Silence*, Ramocon highlights Hollis' natural talent for effortlessly shifting from one key to another mid-song – a feat that would befuddle many a competent musician. This ability to modulate in an instant, added a distinct characteristic to their material, injecting subtle melodrama and dexterity into an otherwise standard pop song.

But it was new producer Tim Friese-Greene whose presence would prove most fortuitous. Hollis was initially attracted by Friese-Greene's knack for getting inside a song without imposing his own aesthetic on it. Before long, Friese-Greene became Hollis' primary co-writer. Like George Martin to The Beatles or Nigel Godrich to Radiohead, Friese-Greene would gradually evolve into an unofficial extra member, both deploying the studio as an instrument and facilitating access to orchestration previously beyond their reach.

Mark and Tim developed a workflow of extended experimentation with sounds and arrangements, searching for that little spark of magic. For Ian Curnow, another keyboard player brought into the melee, this meant "going round the houses" and embracing the mistakes. Speaking to Ben Wardle, Curnow remarked: "There's a magic about a mistake because it's not conscious – it's like freeform jazz... Mark had a nose for that.'"

Hollis was keen to bring in the natural world, though ironically, the seagull and elephant sounds on the record were created on those dastardly synths, when field recordings at London Zoo failed to come up with the goods.

In its slower moments, the album is reminiscent of Depeche Mode, both in its moody detachment and use of stark looped percussion. Vocally, too, Hollis sounds uncannily like Martin Gore at times, with both sharing those long, legato phrases wrapped up with a quick vibrato at the end of the phrase. In time, Hollis would come to regard the voice as another texture in the wider composition, rather than a lead instrument or conduit for lyrics. And this may go some way towards explaining something that so often befuddled hapless critics, wondering what he stood for.

For all the fascination with Mark Hollis, it's easy to sideline the other core members. Paul Webb's rubbery fretless bass is an underappreciated but critical element of Talk Talk's sound. His propulsive yet fluid parts (always prominent in the mix) are nothing short of sublime; a perfect counterpart to Hollis' extended phrases, pushing each track onwards with forward momentum alongside Lee Harris' athletic drums.

For much of its genesis, the album went under the working title: 'A Chameleon Hour', only changed following the ubiquity of another recent Chameleon-themed hit (well, that's karma for you). Clearly Hollis was still enamoured with the idea, though, as it would resurface on the next record's *Chameleon Day*.

Again, James Marsh was called upon for the sleeve artwork, cementing a relationship that would endure for their entire career – typically drawing inspiration from nature, particularly bird and butterfly motifs. Here, he takes elements from the Victorian painting *The Boyhood Of Raleigh*, reimagined through Dali's surrealism.

In action during the *Such A Shame* video shoot, intended to sum up *The Diceman* book in four minutes

THE PLAYERS

MARK HOLLIS
Once Hollis found success on his own terms, he shunned the limelight, to spend time with his family. In another great irony of his life, this only fueled the enigmatic rock star mystique he had always sought to distance himself from.

TIM FRIESE-GREENE
The producer and co-writer had produced Tight Fit's UK No.1 hit *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. Hollis was attracted to three big songs he had produced in three different styles: not imposing a production treatment, but following the music.

PAUL WEBB
While Hollis hogs the conversation, bassist Webb is fundamental to the group's early sound. His throbbing basslines are absolutely key to propelling the album forward. More recently, he has enjoyed acclaim as Rustin Man.

LEE HARRIS
The group's longtime drummer went to school with Webb, with whom he played in a reggae group, Eskalator, before Talk Talk. He formed .O.rang in the early 1990s, again with Webb.

OTHER PLAYERS
The record was the band's first to include a cast of session musicians including percussionist Morris Pert (Kate Bush and Peter Gabriel), keyboardist Ian Curnow, guitarist Robbie McIntosh (later of Paul McCartney and The Pretenders), as well as pianist Phil Ramocon (Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Neneh Cherry).

IN ITS SLOWER MOMENTS, THE ALBUM'S REMINISCENT OF DEPECHE MODE, BOTH IN ITS DETACHMENT AND USE OF STARK, LOOPED PERCUSSION. VOCALLY, HOLLIS SOUNDS UNCANNILY LIKE MARTIN GORE.

SUCH A SHAME

For a group so universally lauded, it's almost inconceivable to imagine a time when Talk Talk were routinely trampled down to the point of persecution. The UK press were savage. If Hollis had hoped *It's My Life* might silence the naysayers, he would have been disappointed. His latest artistic statement was described as "ugly" (*Melody Maker*), "limp and whiney" by the *NME*, and worst of all as "crushingly, excruciatingly average" by *Record Mirror*.

Curiously, *It's My Life* was released exactly one week before The Smiths' eponymous debut LP in February 1984. While the two groups were clearly on very different trajectories, it's impossible not to draw parallels in their shared disdain for synths and clichéd macho rockstar tropes. Yet the difference in perceived credibility at the

Such A Shame **video director Tim Pope eyeballs the camera during filming in early 1984**

time is palpable. The Smiths held the advantage of coming fresh out of the blocks fully realised, without preconception, and little disparity between the rhetoric and execution.

But while *It's My Life* was all but ignored in the UK, it was another story in Europe and the US. Away from the domestic taunts, their sound was resonating internationally, and small ripples would make waves. Case in point: in the UK, Thompson Twins' latest album rose to No.1, while *It's My Life* limped in at No.35. In the States, however, Talk Talk would knock them off the top spot of the Dance Chart. Meanwhile, Talk Talk's popularity in Europe meant additional security to hold back the baying mobs – a very different scenario to that of the local pub back home.

Eventually, the UK cottoned on to what the rest of the word had long recognised. And so Talk Talk and Hollis have risen from "Duran without the lust for success" (*Record Mirror*) to "a god among so many mere mortals" (Tears For Fears' Roland Orzabal). Elbow's Guy Garvey described this transformation as being "as impressive as the moon landings". *It's My Life* wasn't exactly a giant leap for mankind, but it was one small step in that journey towards post-rock visionaries.

After all, in reality, *It's My Life* is not so far removed from *The Party's Over*. With slick, precise and muscular production, it feels rigidly programmed, even when it isn't. It's easy to judge their early output against what they would become – a pitfall even Friese-Greene has succumbed to. Speaking of the single he co-wrote, he said to Jim Irvin in 2006: "I don't think *It's My Life* is a crap song, but you certainly couldn't say it's one of the best... it's nothing to get excited about". Faux modesty, perhaps. Total nonsense, certainly. It's as fine a single as anyone could ever hope to write. And that's nothing to be embarrassed about.

To avoid throwing the baby out with the bath water, *It's My Life* (the album) deserves to be assessed on its own merits. For those of us who don't think pop is a dirty word, does it stand up as a record? Absolutely. It's not perfect, but it's a compelling statement that offers up moments of greatness. *It's My Life* doesn't need apologising for. It's an impressive record from an ambitious young group brimming with potential, yet still finding the language to fully unlock it. ■

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

SUCH A SHAME

Continuing the 'roll of a dice' theme, director Tim Pope wrote down six different moods or emotions on a piece of paper, then rolled the dice to decide which character Hollis should spontaneously embody when performing the next take. Hollis' alternately coloured scarfs signify the different emotions he is portraying (anger, joy, regret?). When Hollis read the emotion 'maudlin', he interpreted the command as meaning the recent politician, Reginald Maudling, so did an impression of him instead. It's a simple, but effective premise. Meanwhile, various configurations of the band play in each take, with the number again representing a roll of the dice.

IT'S MY LIFE

Their next Tim Pope collaboration was a comment on lip-syncing, in many ways the antithesis to the MTV pop video. Filmed at London Zoo, Hollis stands motionless with his mouth glued shut, intercut with wildlife documentary footage and an occasional animated line drawing scurrying across the screen. In the words of Ben Wardle: "although the ideas are conceptually interesting, the video somehow falls flat." EMI thought so, too, demanding a reshoot, with the original video relegated to a background projection behind a standard band performance. Perhaps to save face, Hollis dressed it up as an intentionally meta 'film within a film' concept.

DUM DUM GIRL

Filmed at Sparrow Hall Farm, Bedfordshire, Hollis wanted something very simple and honest, bemoaning the prevalence of videos "so gross in terms of their production and getting more and more distanced from music" (Music Box, 1986). Once again, it goes against all conventional wisdom of a pop promo: basically three mates larking about in a field, complete with banter, and the camera crew often in shot. Again, there's two versions, the first resembling an out-take – at one point, Hollis shouts "I feel like I'm in Pink Floyd" into his mic. It's notable for the fact that the

vocals are performed live (presumably another swipe at lip-syncing in videos). The second is a straighter run-through, but equally touching in its simplicity.

Lease of life: (L-R) Lee Harris, Mark Hollis and Paul Webb shot in Dortmund, Germany, where the album reached the Top 5

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PRESENT PERFECT

AFTER A 35-YEAR HIATUS, FAIRGROUND ATTRACTION ARE BACK – AND FINALLY READY TO MAKE THAT LONG OVERDUE SECOND ALBUM. IN A *CLASSIC POP* EXCLUSIVE, EDDI READER AND MARK NEVIN SHARE THEIR EMOTIONAL STORY OF "RECONCILIATION, RESOLUTION AND HEALING".

PAUL KIRKLEY

© Genevieve Stevenson

It has been a long time coming but, 35 years on, *Classic Pop* can finally reveal the true reason Fairground Attraction suddenly split up at the height of their chart-topping, Brit Award-winning success.

"It was when they didn't let me have 'ladling' during a game of Scrabble on the tour bus," declares singer Eddi Reader, clearly still nursing a grievance over this lexicographical injustice. "They were fucking wrong!"

"That's what it was," concurs guitarist and songwriter Mark Nevin. "It was a Scrabble problem."

They're joking, of course. The real reasons for the folk-rock four-piece's sudden immolation – less than two years after they'd come from nowhere to score a No.1 hit with their debut single *Perfect* – are as messy and complicated as any break-up. But three-and-a-half decades on, Fairground Attraction are back in business – and no one is more surprised and delighted than them.

So, what kept them?

"It's a good question, and we don't quite know how to answer it ourselves," admits Nevin, talking to *CP* over Zoom from his home in London. "Eddi and I didn't really speak to each other for decades, and... it's almost like she's not a real person any more," he smiles. "When we first spent time together again, in Glasgow, Eddi was sitting at the piano, and I looked over and thought: Is this actually happening? Is she real? I almost wanted to reach out and make sure she wasn't a ghost."

A MATTER OF TIME

Reader, looking on from her native Glasgow, smiles affectionately. Having reopened communications last year – when she jumped on stage at one of Mark's solo shows for an impromptu version of FA fan favourite *Allelujia* – the two are clearly enjoying each other's company again, along with fellow founding members Simon Edwards (guitarrón) and Roy Dodds (drums).

"There were a number of factors [that led to the rapprochement]," reflects Mark. "I think we've probably grown up, finally. Also, you look around and you see people like Terry Hall, Sinéad O'Connor and Shane MacGowan all leaving us. You think: hold on, this isn't going to go on forever. I remember thinking that the day after David Bowie died. I used to worry that one day I'd run out of ideas, and when Bowie died I thought: you don't run out of ideas. You just run out of time."

"I think the big C word – Covid – was also a factor," says Eddi. "Mark and Roy both had real run-ins with it, and it's kind of frightening how fragile life is. How quickly it could be over, and there would be no opportunity for reconciliation or resolution or healing."

© Alamy

Perfect days: (Clockwise from left) Eddi Reader, Simon Edwards, Mark Nevin and Roy Dodds, circa 1987

A more immediate impetus for the band was being offered a gig at Club QUATTRO in Shibuya, Tokyo, where Fairground Attraction – who, industry cliché though it may be, genuinely were big in Japan – had first played 35 years ago. "It just seemed really interesting that we could maybe go to where we

A brand new start: It took 35 years to come about, but Fairground Attraction make their return – "like opening the doors again to joy, love and happiness," explained Eddi Reader

© Genevieve Stevenson

The reformed Fairground Attraction are currently working on a new album, ***Beautiful Happening***

kind of finished, and just depress the pause button," says Reader.

"That just seemed right to me. I thought: I want to go there and celebrate that thing that we did. Because I've missed it. I've missed Mark and Simon and Roy. I missed that collective. But I've also missed Mark's songs. They're manna from heaven for singers. They demand your authenticity."

"It's the same for me, with Eddi," adds Mark. "She just connects to the songs, to the way I write them. There's just something between us. Eddi and I are both from big families – she's number one of seven kids and I'm number six of eight – and we were born two weeks apart [they're both 64]. So, we have very similar musical influences."

Having agreed to play the Tokyo show, things quickly escalated: firstly, into a tour in Japan, then a UK tour, to be accompanied by a brand new album, *Beautiful Happening* – only the second in Fairground Attraction's stop-start (but mainly stop) career.

> "I'VE MISSED MARK, AND SIMON AND ROY. BUT I'VE ALSO MISSED MARK'S SONGS. THEY'RE MANNA FROM HEAVEN FOR SINGERS."
>
> **EDDI READER**

So, what was it like when, earlier this year, all four of them finally got back in a rehearsal room again and started playing together? "It was emotional, but it was also quite funny," remembers Nevin. "Because it was just exactly the same as it used to be. We all just slotted into the roles we were so familiar with."

"There was a lovely moment for me," recalls Eddi, "when me and Roy were visiting Mark, and his son was playing piano. I said to Roy, 'let's go help him out – I'll sing along and you can batter something'. And I just thought: 'God, this is lovely'. This is how it should be. Families, and our children, experiencing what we are, as a group of human beings on the planet at the same time. How remarkable is that miracle? The world is billions of years old, and we've all landed at the same time."

COMING ATTRACTION

While *Beautiful Happening*, due for release in September, is still a work in progress (with Mark teasing that it will be "the story of us"), in March fans got to hear the first fruits of the sessions with the release of the single *What's Wrong With The World?* Sounding reassuringly like the Fairground Attraction of old – Reader's mountain-clear voice soaring and swooping over a warm, laidback folk shuffle – it's a more personal, self-lacerating song than its title might suggest, built around the idea that "you can change the mirror, but not the reflection".

"I really liked that line," explains Mark. "And then I was reminded of the famous story of GK Chesterton, who wrote a letter to *The Times* where he said: "In response to your question, 'What's wrong with the world?' – I am.'"

Another line sees Reader singing of "coming face to face with my imperfection". There's an irresistible symmetry, suggests *Classic Pop*, to a band who became overnight stars with a song about how it had to be perfect, returning three-and-a-half decades later with one acknowledging their imperfections. Was that deliberate?

"Well, no. It only came about because I needed a rhyme for reflection – and we couldn't have an erection!" chuckles Nevin. "So, I came up with imperfection, and I was delighted when I realised that it not only rhymed perfectly, but also with the significance of it... Of how it resonates with our past, and our story. My favourite part of the video is when Eddi sings that line and looks directly into the camera. It's such a moment."

"WE'LL HAVE THAT SONG AT OUR FUNERAL..."

"It's miraculous," says Eddi Reader, of *Perfect*'s continued cultural reach. "And such a compliment to think that, in our own selfish way, we carved out something that other people saw the light in, whether it's in Asda or Ikea, or somebody's wedding reception or funeral..."

"Somebody's *funeral*?" laughs Nevin.

"Yeah. I'm having it at my funeral!" insists Eddi.

"We should have a joint funeral," suggests Mark. "And we'll have that song."

We'll take that as a *Classic Pop* exclusive. Have they ever worried that the song cast too long a shadow over their careers? "No," says Nevin, firmly. "If you're going to complain about that, you don't really deserve success."

"Yeah," agrees Reader. "I mean, if it's that or *Mr Blobby*, which would I prefer?"

"*Mr Blobby* every time," deadpans Mark. "But no, sometimes when people ask what I do, and I tell them I wrote that song, they look at me like I've written *Happy Birthday* or something. It's just a blessing."

© Genevieve Stevenson

Fairground Attraction take their new album on a 14-date UK tour from 28 September to 18 October

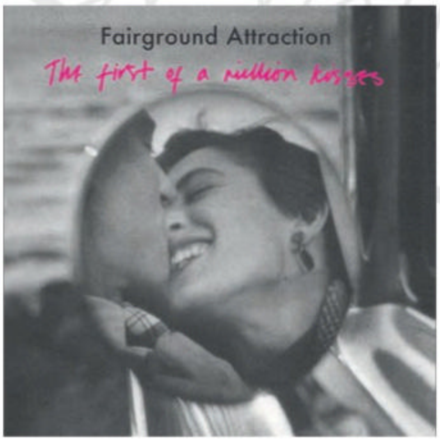
ALONG FOR THE RIDE

Released in March 1988, no one expected *Perfect* to be a No.1 hit – least of all the people who made it. Going into the studio to record their album *The First Of A Million Kisses*, the band's brand of mellow, acoustic folk-pop couldn't have been more out of step with the era's acid house scene. So worried were they, in fact, about a producer trying to make them sound more contemporary, they persuaded their record company, RCA, to let them produce the record themselves – despite having no real production experience.

"We definitely had our youthful opinions: 'That's shite, that's good, all of that," says Eddi. "Everybody watched *Top Of The Pops* and went: 'no, no, no, yes, no'. But by the time the band came along... You know when you're starving, and you don't really know it? By that time, I was starving.

"I'd been singing since I was four, so by the time I got to 28, I thought: if I have to do another 'ooh baby'... I needed songs with meat on them. Stuff that broke your heart. And Mark was just walking about with his bag of songs."

While Eddi had built a reputation as an in-demand session singer and backing vocalist for the likes of the Eurythmics, Alison Moyet and Gang of Four, a teenage Mark had arrived in London in the late 70s with a guitar and a headful of dreams. By the mid-80s, he was performing in a Motown covers band called Gina And The Tonics, with former Kinks backing singers Debi Doss



and Shirlie Roden. But that creative alliance came to a bruising end in a hospital A&E department, after the thug landlord and bouncers of a Tooting pub had set about the band with baseball bats.

"We had another gig a few days later, and Debi and Shirlie decided they didn't want to do it, unsurprisingly," recalls Mark. "So, we urgently needed a new backing singer. I called up my friend Anthony Thistlethwaite, from The Waterboys, and he said, 'I know this girl called Eddi...'"

By the time Fairground Attraction went into the studio, then, both Eddi and Mark had been paying their dues for a good 10 years. Even so, they had zero expectations of commercial success – so were astonished when *Perfect* became a huge hit right out of the gate, landing in Top 10s around the world, and topping the charts in the UK, Ireland, Australia and South Africa.

"It was completely weird," says Nevin. "We used to go play at alternative cabaret clubs – little back rooms in pubs, where we'd be the music and Vic [Reeves] and Bob [Mortimer] would be the comedians. We just saw ourselves like that. It was a surprise to get a proper record deal. And then when *Perfect* went to No.1 it was just like: '*What?*'"

KISS GOODBYE

The First Of A Million Kisses, released just two months later, also reached platinum status, and at the following year's Brit Awards, Fairground Attraction became the first band in history to scoop both the single and album of the year gongs.

And then... as quickly as they had arrived, it was over. In January 1990, in the midst of recording their second album, the band suddenly announced that they'd split up. (A second LP, *Ay Fond Kiss*, was released in June that year, assembled from B-sides and unreleased songs from sessions for *The First Of A Million Kisses*.)

Even by rock'n'roll's boom-and-bust standards, it feels like a hyper-accelerated trajectory, suggests *Classic Pop*. "*Everything* was hyper-accelerated," agrees Mark. "We weren't prepared for [success], and we had no idea how to deal with it. Everything was confused."

Eddi Reader has high hopes of extending Fairground Attraction's comeback tour to North America and Australasia

© Genevieve Stevenson

"I WAS HEARTBROKEN. I WAS PLAYING WITH MORRISSEY. BUT I COULDN'T CARE LESS. I WANTED TO BE WITH EDDI AND THE BAND."

MARK NEVIN

"I was so traumatised," remembers Reader of the split. "I went on holiday with my mum and dad, in a caravan from Glasgow to County Kerry. And I was in the back of the caravan, with a new baby, just thinking: 'This is it. Back to nothing. Back to where I was'."

"I was heartbroken," says Nevin. "I was playing and writing with Morrissey [see box], and everyone was like: 'Wow, you've got the ultimate gig of stepping into Johnny Marr's shoes. But I couldn't care less. I just wanted to be with Eddi and the band."

"There was a time when I didn't sing any Fairground Attraction songs, because I was full of hurt that it was gone," admits Eddi. "It felt like my dead child or something. Also, I didn't feel I could do them without the boys. But then I started to fall in love with them again, one by one, like little bubbles coming up to the surface. They wanted to be sung."

"We both just carried on, because to stop would have been absolutely unthinkable," says Mark, of the pair's subsequent solo careers. "We carried on until we found each other again. And here we are."

FAIR PLAY

Classic Pop wonders if they wish they'd sought each other out sooner? "I can't imagine anything being any different to how it is," says Reader. "I don't know who I'd be, or who Mark would be, had we continued with Fairground Attraction. I could have been dead under a table in Los Angeles by now."

"No, it is absolutely right that it happened," agrees Mark. "It was very difficult. But we've learned a lot as musicians, and as human beings."

"We needed to be threshed with life," suggests Eddi. "We had to be threshed with families, divorces, bringing up kids..."

And have they dared contemplate how long the ride might last this time? Might they even make it to a third album? "Well, we've got until the end of the UK tour," says Mark, cautiously. "Anything after that is a bonus."

"I have ambition, and I can put it in the universe as a want," reflects Reader. "I would love to do the things that we didn't do – maybe play some gigs in America, go to Australia, New Zealand...

"But I don't really give a monkey's about what happens, as long as we're mates. Everything else is just minor details. Whether we sell one ticket, one record, or gazillions of them, is irrelevant. The bottom line is that, at the end of this, we're still friends." ■

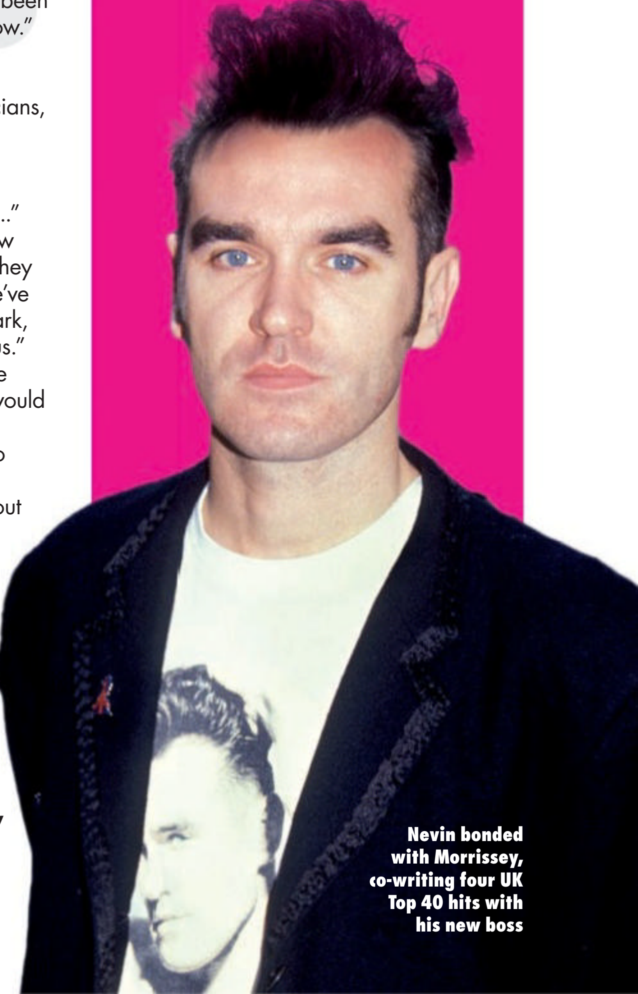
● *Beautiful Happening* is released on 20 September via Raresong Recordings. Tickets for the upcoming UK tour are on sale at aegpresents.co.uk/event/fairground-attraction/

THEIR SOLO ATTRACTIONS

"*Perfect* was like a ticket for me, it gave me an instant audience," says Reader of her subsequent long and distinguished solo career, highlights of which have included a third Brit Award (won for Best British Female in 1995) and a second signature song, in the Boo Hewerdine-penned and Ivor Novello-nominated *Patience Of Angels*. Her musical interpretations of the poems of Robert Burns, meanwhile, were cited as a major factor in her 2006 MBE for outstanding contribution to the arts.

Nevin, meanwhile, struck up a fertile partnership with Morrissey, co-writing songs for his *Kill Uncle* and *Your Arsenal* albums. "He'd just broken up with The Smiths, and was greatly wounded by that, so we had that in common," Mark reflects. "We both understood what the loss was like."

Kirsty MacColl was another close collaborator, while Nevin's songs have been performed by artists from Ringo Starr and Carole King to David Bowie, who covered Morrissey's *I Know It's Gonna Happen Someday* on *Black Tie, White Noise*. "That was bonkers," says Mark. "And it was produced by Nile Rodgers. I still can't quite believe that happened."



Nevin bonded with Morrissey, co-writing four UK Top 40 hits with his new boss

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ALBUM BY ALBUM

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

FRONTED BY THE EVER OUTSPOKEN IAN McCULLOCH, THE LIVERPOOL BAND BECAME INDIE HEROES WITH A SOUND THAT CONSTANTLY LEANED TOWARDS THE DARKER AND MORE DRAMATIC SIDE OF POST-PUNK

JON O'BRIEN

Although Echo And The Bunnymen weren't the first band to emerge from the ashes of The Crucial Three, an extremely short-lived (just six weeks to be exact) yet ultimately pivotal bedroom trio featuring Ian McCulloch, Julian Cope and Pete Wylie, they were the first to release a full-length LP.

Crocodiles arrived three months before The Teardrop Explodes' *Kilimanjaro* and a full year before Wah!'s *Nah=Poo – The Art of Bluff*. The album's producers ensured that all three bands remained interlinked, with David Balfe and manager Bill Drummond also working on the former and Ian Broudie mixing two tracks on the latter. But as implied by its title and the mysterious woodland setting of its artwork, the Bunnymen's debut was a very different beast.

While Cope's explored the sunnier side of neo-psychedelia and Wylie's the more passionate, McCulloch's offshoot aimed straight for the dark jugular on 10 tracks entrenched in themes of death, doom and despair. "Is this the blues I'm singing?" he repeatedly asks on the climax of second single *Rescue*, a brilliantly meta ode to teenage indecision, and he might as well have been.

Although Ian McCulloch remains a proud Liverpudlian, *Crocodiles* doesn't paint his hometown in the most positive of lights. "Let's get the hell out of here," McCulloch demands on opener *Going Up*. That's an understandable rally cry on hearing *Villiers Terrace*, a resolutely grim, if impressively poetic, snapshot of the drug-addled cultural scene his band were initially lumped in with ("There's people rolling 'round on the carpet/ Passing 'round the medicine"). Interestingly, the man at the epicentre of the neighbouring Manchester scene, Factory Records' boss Tony Wilson, declared that *Villiers Terrace* was one of the best songs ever written. Not for the first time, the impresario might have been guilty of a little hyperbole.

> McCULLOCH'S OFFSHOOT AIMED FOR THE DARK JUGULAR WITH THEMES OF DEATH, DOOM AND DESPAIR

However, *Crocodiles* is undoubtedly one of the most striking and self-assured debuts of the era. McCulloch, particularly amid the swirling haunted house organs of *Pictures On My Wall*, has enough confidence to convincingly channel his musical hero Jim Morrison. The rest of the group get their moment to shine, too, though. See Les Pattinson's driving basslines on *Monkeys* and guitarist Will Sergeant's pyrotechnic freakout on album closer *Happy Death Men*.

Meanwhile, Pete de Freitas' scattergun rhythms on the foreboding Cold War anthem *All That Jazz* single-handedly justifies the decision to abandon the 'Echo' drum machine that the band used in their early live shows. *Crocodiles* can be a harrowing listen, for sure, but it's also repeatedly thrilling. A new bunch of cult heroes were born.

CROCODILES
Released 1980
Label Korova
Chart Positions
UK No.17
NZ No.36

Replaced by Hugh Jones, who had engineered *Crocodiles* and also co-produced follow-up EP *Shine So Hard*, a slightly bitter Drummond later described *Heaven Up Here* as "dull as ditchwater". The *NME* of 1981 certainly didn't concur, however, giving the Top 10 breakthrough both Best Album and, thanks to the evocative artwork where the silhouetted band scare off a bunch of seagulls on the South Wales coast, the curiously titled Best Dressed Sleeve awards.

It's true *Heaven Up Here* has little light to go with its varying degrees of shade. Indeed, despite using The Velvet Underground's uncharacteristically upbeat *What Goes On* as a main reference point, it's arguably even chillier and more oppressive than its predecessor. Little surprise, therefore, that its only UK single *A Promise* failed to chart inside the Top 40. But contrary to Drummond's belief, it's an album full of intrigue, and one whose off-kilter charms unfold with each listen. From the Gang of Four-esque riffwork which penetrates *No Dark Things* and the title track's wall of sound, Sergeant's intricate playing – occasionally recorded using a pair of scissors instead of a plectrum for reasons unknown – can take much of the credit. Just ask McCulloch, who's since attributed the entirety of *Heaven Up Here* to his lead guitarist, albeit because of his "control freak" tendencies in the studio.

HEAVEN UP HERE HAS LITTLE LIGHT TO GO WITH ITS SHADE. IT'S ARGUABLY EVEN CHILLIER THAN ITS PREDECESSOR.

'Mac the Mouth', as he'd now become known, still got several chances to take centre stage though, whether interpolating Del Shannon's rock'n'roll classic *Runaway* on the smouldering *Over The Wall*, playing the torch singer on the haunting, beat-free *The Disease* or engaging in some playful wordplay on the surprisingly funky *With A Hip* ("With a hip hip hop and a flip flap flop/ Gonna steal some bananas from the grocer's shop"). He also gets everyone guessing about the meaning of zimbo (an anagram of an old African word apparently) on *All My Colours*, the percussive highlight that the band famously performed with the Drummers Of Burundi at the inaugural WOMAD.

Heaven Up Here's lack of discernible hooks means it works more as a collection of soundscapes than songs. Nevertheless, few post-punk outfits have conjured up a record as atmospheric.

HEAVEN UP HERE
Released 1981
Label Korova
Chart Positions
UK No.10
US No.184

Having bypassed the second difficult album syndrome, Echo And The Bunnymen suddenly discovered it was number three they had to worry about. While McCulloch was still hellbent on world domination, Pattinson had become more interested in building boats than playing basslines. Meanwhile de Freitas and Sergeant got itchy feet, lending their talents to fellow Scousers Wild Swans and a solo instrumental album respectively.

Tensions were high, therefore, when they reconvened at their Liverpool rehearsal room under the watchful eye of Drummond.

While in confident form on *Heaven Up Here*, de Freitas later said material was more difficult to come by on its follow-up. It didn't help that WEA sent them back to the studio due to fears about its commercial appeal. Nevertheless, as the saying goes: "From great suffering comes great art."

Produced by Ian Broudie under the pseudonym 'Kingbird', *Porcupine* not only came within a whisker of the UK No.1 spot, it gave the band two consecutive Top 20 singles, both with arrangements from Indian violinist and composer Shankar Lakshminarayana.

Spawning their *Top Of The Pops* debut, *The Back Of Love* briefly suggested the band were muscling in on U2's stadium rock territory. However, *The Cutter*, a brilliantly esoteric piece of Middle Eastern-tinged psychedelia which continued their tradition of borrowing from

PORCUPINE CAME WITHIN A WHISKER OF THE UK NO.1 SPOT AND GAVE THEM TWO TOP 20 SINGLES

60s classics (on this occasion Cat Stevens' *Matthew And Son*), proved that any sellout accusations were well wide of the mark.

Indeed, despite the interference from their record label, *Porcupine* was still very much the Bunnymen carving out their own distinct path. The gothic romance of the title track, for example, saw Sergeant ditch the angular guitars for those of the flamenco variety. *My White Devil* even contained a marimba solo. And which other post-punk outfit were bold enough to give free rein to the man who invented the stereophonic double violin?

While the previously supportive *NME* carried out a trademark about-turn ("turning on their own greatest 'hits' and savaging them"), the paranoia-soaked *Porcupine* may well be the quartet's defining statement of intent.

PORCUPINE
Released 1983
Label Korova/WEA
Chart Positions
UK No.2
US No.137

Following McCulloch's acrimonious departure in 1988 ("more interested in changing oil in their cars than rock'n'roll" was the verdict on his bandmates in an interview with Kieran Grant in 1997), it was assumed the remaining members would call it a day. Much to their ex-frontman's disgust, however, the trio forged ahead with a replacement and, in 1990, a sixth LP.

The signs were ominous when de Freitas was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident on his way to the first rehearsal. Undeterred, Sergeant, Pattinson and new singer Noel Burke soldiered on, recruiting their touring keyboardist Jake Brockman and future Spiritualized drummer Damon Reece.

Even taking all the personnel changes into account, it's striking just how different this Version 2.0 sounds, somewhere between the psychedelia of the 60s (album producer Geoff Emerick engineered *Sgt. Pepper*) and the baggy movement of the late 80s. Burke occasionally attempts to channel his predecessor's deep croon, as on *Thick Skinned World*. However, his vocals have more in common with Morrissey, particularly on the New Order-ish opener *Gone, Gone, Gone*.

While no lost classic, *Reverberation* would likely be more fondly appreciated without its baggage.

A chart flop, the band were dropped and two years on, pulled the plug, apparently for good.

REVERBERATION

Released 1990
Label Korova/WEA
Chart Position
UK No.96

If WEA thought *Porcupine* was uncommercial, one can only imagine their faces on hearing the Gil Norton co-produced follow-up *Ocean Rain* for the first time. Sergeant has said the band wanted a more conceptual piece with lush orchestration – something darkly twisted and not in the realms of Mantovani-style lushness.

Nowhere is that more evident than on shamanic epic *Thorn Of Crowns*, in which frazzled guitars resemble acid house bleeps and McCulloch flits between howls and stuttered lists of vegetables.

Yet *Nocturnal Me*, part-sea shanty, part-military march, part-Eastern European cabaret, and macabre mini-suite *The Yo Yo Man*, ("Collecting the bones of my friends tonight/ Sowing the seeds in a fruitless land") are nearly as wonderfully deranged. Ironically, *Ocean Rain* also boasts the band's biggest hit and, with over 170 million Spotify plays, by far their most enduring.

While millennials may know *The Killing Moon* from the *Donnie Darko* soundtrack, Generation X will remember it as 1984's crowning indie glory, a majestic blend of shimmering *Space Oddity*-inspired guitars, torch song melodies and astronomical imagery. "I know there isn't a band in the world who's got a song anywhere near that," a typically immodest McCulloch once told *The Guardian*. In this instance, his self-aggrandising has a ring of truth.

OCEAN RAIN BOASTS THEIR BIGGEST HIT – WITH OVER 170 MILLION SPOTIFY PLAYS, BY FAR THEIR MOST ENDURING

Although nowhere near as ubiquitous, follow-up singles *Silver* and *Seven Seas* are top-tier Bunnymen, too, the former a surprisingly jangly opener which eased listeners into all the wonkiness ahead, the latter a nautical tale in which Norton's production sounds every bit as cavernous as the album's cover.

McCulloch had recorded his vocals in Paris alongside the 35-piece orchestra which gives *Ocean Rain* its baroque sheen. But dissatisfied with the results, an overindulgence in the capital's many brasseries apparently to blame, he decided that less inebriated hometown retakes were in order.

It was a wise decision, McCulloch's booming baritone clearer and more expressive than ever before, particularly on the funereal title track, which brings what many consider to be their magnum opus to a dignified end.

OCEAN RAIN

Released 1984
Label Korova/WEA
Chart Positions
UK No.4
US No.87

The start of Echo And The Bunnymen's transitional period, their self-titled fifth LP was the band's first since replacing Drummond with Duran Duran's tour manager Mick Hancock, their final with de Freitas, whose addiction issues had caused him to resign and then beg for his reappointment during its recording, and their most concerted bid for the mainstream. A successful one as it goes, its No.51 peak on the US Hot 100 Billboard still their highest to date.

Produced by Laurie Latham, who'd worked on their *Pretty In Pink* contribution *Bring On The Dancing Horses*, *Echo & The Bunnymen* has repeatedly been dismissed by the band themselves, with Sergeant describing it as "overcooked fish", and McCulloch, "the sound of radio America". Perhaps burned by its difficult inception – there were also failed attempts with previous producers Norton and Broudie, while WEA boss Rob Dickens implored them to try to echo Peter Gabriel's *So*, much to their disdain – that's a little harsh on a record which although far more direct, still retains the general sense of Bunniness.

THE START OF A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD, THE FIFTH ALBUM WAS THEIR MOST CONCERTED BID FOR THE MAINSTREAM

Since covered by artists as diverse as Coldplay, Seal and David Hasselhoff, *Lips Like Sugar* certainly merits a place on any Best Of, its Anton Corbijn-directed *Star Trek*-esque promo video briefly turning Liverpool's moodiest music exports into unlikely MTV heroes. Likewise, the unexpectedly groovy third single *Bedbugs And Ballyhoo*, whose guest appearance from the legendary keyboardist Ray Manzarek practically invited further comparisons to The Doors.

Elsewhere, gorgeous closer *All My Life* hinted at both the band's future ("Oh how the times have changed us/ Sure and now uncertain/ Men not devils have claimed us") and the stately guitar pop of their 90s comeback, while the driving *Lost And Found* proved how much of a loss they were about to suffer.

The Bunnymen may have stumbled on for five more years, but for all intents and purposes, this is their original swansong, and a majestic one at that.

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

Released 1987
Label WEA
Chart Positions
UK No.4
US No.51

You can't keep a Bunnyman down for too long. Just four years after the much-maligned second incarnation of Liverpool's finest called it a day, the surviving original line-up staged one of post-punk's finest comebacks.

Arriving at the tail end of Cool Britannia, *Evergreen* essentially served as a precursor to the post-Britpop era, laddishness and Beatles-worship replaced by heart-on-sleeve sentiments, sweeping orchestral strings and a general sense of melancholy. Had *Urban Hymns* not arrived just two months later, you might think The Verve had copied its template.

The Bunnymen's unexpected seventh LP didn't reach the same million-selling heights, but it did spawn their joint-biggest hit. Peaking at No.8, the instant classic *Nothing Lasts Forever* was a fitting message for a time when New Labour's honeymoon period and Oasis' imperial phase were all wrapping up: backing vocalist Liam Gallagher no doubt wished the impending *Be Here Now* had something even half as dignified.

Just A Touch Away and closer *Forgiven* were similarly bittersweet symphonies, the latter summarising McCulloch's push-pull ("A blinding light, a blackest night/ They're both inside of me"). Meanwhile, the grunge-lite *I'll Fly Tonight*, the closest the album gets to McCulloch and Sergeant's 90s side project Electrafixion, spiritual *Don't Let It Get You Down* and the no-nonsense *Altamont* allowed Robert Plant drummer Michael Lee the chance to prove his worth. Against all odds, the Bunnymen delivered a reunion masterclass.

EVERGREEN
Released 1997
Label London
Chart Positions
UK No.8
AUS No.98

"What are you going to do with your life?" the Bunnymen asked at the turn of the millennium, a timely existential question further highlighting their ability to capture the general mood of the era. Their own answer appeared to be 'make a record more introspective, melancholic and world weary than ever before'.

Indeed, the presence of co-producer Alan Douglas (The Jam, Adam Ant) and modern-day lounge lizards Fun Lovin' Criminals may well have suggested a post-modern return to their psychedelic roots. However, the former seemed to issue a near-blanket ban on guitars, while the latter provides musical accompaniment only. There are no Quentin Tarantino samples, hip-hop beats or smooth-talking lotharios to be found here.

Quite understandably, Sergeant didn't appreciate his talents being sidelined and characterised the album's recording as among the worst periods of his life. And with Pattinson choosing to make his exit in the wake of both a family illness and repeated arguments with McCulloch, the band were in danger of imploding once more.

The Bunnymen's eighth album occasionally alludes to all the tension – "There's something going wrong again," an unusually hushed McCulloch croons on the acoustic title track. But in another example of their contradictory nature, the record is the band's most harmonious, with the pop classicism of the 1960s an obvious reference point. *When It All Blows Over* essentially paraphrases The Beatles' *When I'm 64*, for example, while there are shades of Burt Bacharach on final track *Fools Like Us*.

THEIR EIGHTH LP SOUNDS MORE LIKE A FOLLOW-UP TO McCULLOCH'S SOLO DEBUT THAN ONE TO *EVERGREEN*

In fact, *What Are You Going To Do With Your Life?* sounds more like a follow-up to McCulloch's solo debut *Candleland* than one to the *Evergreen* LP.

The band's final Top 40 hit *Rust* borrows wholesale from his 1992 B-side *Ribbons And Chains*. It sounds like the Bunnymen are once again closing the curtains on their career. Not for the first time, though, their tenacity saw them return once more.

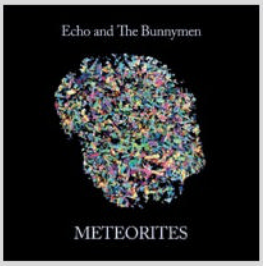
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE?
Released 1999
Label London
Chart Position
UK No.21

"It was the wrong vehicle we were driving, left-hand drive," remarked an uncharacteristically self-critical McCulloch to *Uncut* about the band's first entirely self-produced affair. "We were just spinning round with no direction or knowledge of where to turn off." For once, the Liverpudlian was selling his band a little short.

While it is far from their most essential record, *Flowers* still contains some of their best work as a duo. The aquatic pedal effects, vibraphones and chilled grooves of opener *King Of Kings* help provide an immaculate slice of 60s lounge-pop. While, making great use of the theremin, *Buried Alive* is a poetic ode to the past ("Somewhere under a Delvaux moon/ Childhood's end came too soon") which takes its cues from 70s Lou Reed. And album closer *Burn For Me* proved that Mac the Mouth could still knock out a lighter-waving ballad in his sleep.

It's also their most playful, with McCulloch appearing to channel Liam Gallagher's elongated vowels on the Britpop throwback *Make Me Shine*. And although *It's Alright* proved their adoration of The Doors remained intact, the more bubblegum psychedelia of tongue twister *An Eternity Turns* suggested they also have an affinity for The Monkees. While its predecessor hinted that the pair were settling into middle age, *Flowers* proved that they weren't ready for the pipe and slippers just yet.

FLOWERS
Released 2001
Label Cooking Vinyl
Chart Position
UK No.56



"More edgy than anything I've ever done," came Ian McCulloch's regular boast about the group's 12th, and possibly final, entirely original album. Lyrically, he may be right. Instead of drowning in metaphors, much of this LP shoots a little straighter. Final track *New Horizons* addresses the difficult relationship with his gambling addict father, while *Grapes Upon The Vine* tackles McCulloch's own dependency.

Musically, this is the band accepting their elder statesmen status, evident by the opening title track's arrangement. No stranger to string-soaked indie-rock as producer of The Verve's *Urban Hymns*, Youth gives McCulloch and Sergeant the freedom to indulge. None more so than on *Market Town*, a seven-minute epic where the former bemoans social decay above the latter's wall of squalling guitars.

Lovers On The Run is similarly grandiose, a burst of sweeping romanticism which sounds like the sequel to *The Killing Moon*, and the sumptuous balladry of *Burn It Down*.

Meteorites isn't quite the celestial experience promised. It still lacks the tension of the group's classic rhythm section, highlighted by Sergeant's reunion with Pattinson on their side project Poltergeist one year earlier, and McCulloch's whining on *Holy Moses* is possibly his vocal nadir. But it's another example of how you should write the Bunnymen off at your peril.

METEORITES
Released 2014
Label 429
Chart Positions
UK No.37
US No.138

2001 retrospective *Crystal Days* seemed to inspire McCulloch and Sergeant to further embrace the past, reuniting with *Heaven Up Here* producer Hugh Jones for a record steeped in both the sounds and mythology of their 80s heyday.

The autobiographical *Parthenon Drive* serves as a sequel of sorts to *Villiers Terrace*; the foot-stomping *Of A Life* namechecks their first compilation *Songs To Learn And Sing*, while the grungy *Scissors In The Sand* harked back to when Bunnymen lyrics were at the oblique end of the poetry spectrum ("Something on the roof/ And in the wall/ My silverfishing youth/ Swim don't crawl").

Siberia also puts Sergeant front and centre more than any post-comeback affair, from the echo-drenched riffs on *In The Margins* and jagged buzzsaws of *Sideways Eight* to the chiming wall of sound on *Make Us Blind*, which is a highlight of the Bunnymen's 21st century output.

Released during the peak of indie sleaze, the public were sadly more interested in those the Bunnymen inspired: *Siberia* remains their only LP to miss the UK Top 75. But it's far more welcoming than its chilly title implies.

SIBERIA
Released 2005
Label
Cooking Vinyl
Chart Positions
UK No.83
FRA No.161

Known for producing boybands Busted and 5ive, John McLaughlin was a curveball appointment for the band's 11th studio effort. Before the purists could bring out their pitchforks, however, *The Fountain* was entirely free of any schoolboy punk or *SMTV*-friendly pop. More's the pity, you could say.

Indeed, had the independent release spawned a little more synchronised stage-jumping, it might not have wound up as the most nondescript record of their career. It starts promisingly, with the surging *Think I Need It Too*, possibly their strongest lead single this century. But elsewhere, only the funky *Life Of A Thousand Crimes* and barroom stomper *Proxy* stand out from an LP seemingly designed for the XFM playlist.

Even the title track, apparently featuring vocals from longtime fan Chris Martin, sounds like the band going through the motions, its nautical lyrics serving as a reminder of a far more captivating past.

The Fountain marked the point where McCulloch's Bunnymen had released as many albums in their second phase as their first.

It was also the point where they'd appeared to have run out of ideas.

THE FOUNTAIN
Released 2009
Label
Ocean Rain
Chart Positions
UK No.63
FRA No.176

Ever wanted to hear a hotel lounge version of *Nothing Lasts Forever*? *Seven Seas* transformed into a sorrowful sea shanty? *The Killing Moon* stripped down like Gary Jules' version of *Mad World*? Well, *The Stars, The Oceans & The Moon* is the Echo & The Bunnymen album for you.

Just when it looked as though they had rediscovered their mojo once again, the Liverpudlians succumbed to the lazy concept that befalls every veteran guitar band at some point or other: the re-recorded Greatest Hits. Not that McCulloch was particularly bothered about any groans of disappointment that greeted its release. "I'm not doing this for anyone else," he explained in a press statement. "I'm doing it as it's important to me to make the songs better."

Even the most charitable of listeners would struggle to find one example in which this goal was achieved. On *Zimbo*, the original title of *All My Colours*, it's perhaps the closest it gets, transforming the tribal number into the kind of twangy blues you can imagine gracing a David Lynch chiller. However, the majority of this back catalogue trawl lacks the vibrancy of the originals.

HERE McCULLOCH SEEMS TO BE WRESTLING WITH NOTES HE ONCE KNOCKED OUT OF THE PARK

McCulloch also seems to be struggling to recapture lightning in a bottle. His sonorous voice has always showed the effects of his chain-smoking, alcohol-fuelled lifestyle. Even on the band's debut, you could practically smell the Benson & Hedges. Yet here, particularly on the Britpop-esque retooling of *Lips Like Sugar*, he seems to be wrestling with notes he once knocked out of the park.

Admittedly, there's nothing that could be considered a trainwreck. Co-producer Jez Wing, a graduate of the group's hometown LIPA, keeps things restrained and refined. And two new songs, *The Somnambulist* and *How Far?*, are perfectly fine additions to the group's arsenal of indie-rockers.

But, although it returned the band to the Top 20 in the UK for the first time in nearly two decades, it's the pure definition of inessential.

THE STARS, THE OCEANS & THE MOON
Released 2018
Label BMG
Chart Position
UK No.11

DANAGILLESPIE
DANAGILLESPIE
First Love
"A late career uptick seems highly likely"
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First Love
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Features the songs of Bowie, Dylan, Morrissey and more...
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MICHEL MOERS
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As Is
new Solo album
Featuring
CLAUDIA BRÜCKEN
(Propaganda)
DAAN
"Each of these 10 tracks feels like an individually cut gem. The final word of the album is 'encore'. Indeed – more of this, please, and soon"
Electronic Sound
michel moers
Claudia Brücken
Daan
As Is
As Is' represents a triumphant return for Moers, lead singer of Belgium's first electronic band Telex, blending his past influences with contemporary sounds and themes, and testifying to his creativity and adaptability in an ever-changing musical landscape.
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TERRIBLE MIMING! SAXOPHONE DISASTERS! A KIM WILDE CAMEO! STEPHEN MORRIS AND GILLIAN GILBERT'S ACCIDENTAL POP CAREER AWAY FROM NEW ORDER AS THE OTHER TWO HAS BEEN AN ADVENTURE THEY HAVE NEVER QUITE CONTROLLED...

JOHN EARLS

Two's company

"It wasn't so much that we came up with the name The Other Two, it's that other people kept calling us that anyway." So begins Stephen Morris' explanation of the strange and subterranean history of New Order's most mischievous side project.

When Bernard Sumner began Electronic and Peter Hook launched Revenge in the wake of their parent band's rave-era classic *Technique*, New Order's drummer and keyboardist Gillian Gilbert were initially left kicking their heels.

With perfect timing, the pair were then suddenly reminded that they had work to do after all. Shortly before recording began on *Technique* in Ibiza, New Order had been approached to compose the soundtrack for BBC1 series *Making Out*, a Manchester-set factory drama that starred Keith Allen and Margi Clarke. "We agreed, and immediately forgot that we'd said yes," admits Morris.

And just as Bernard and Hooky announced their solo plans, *Making Out* producer John Chapman appeared at the mixing sessions for *Technique* to ask how New Order were getting on with that soundtrack...

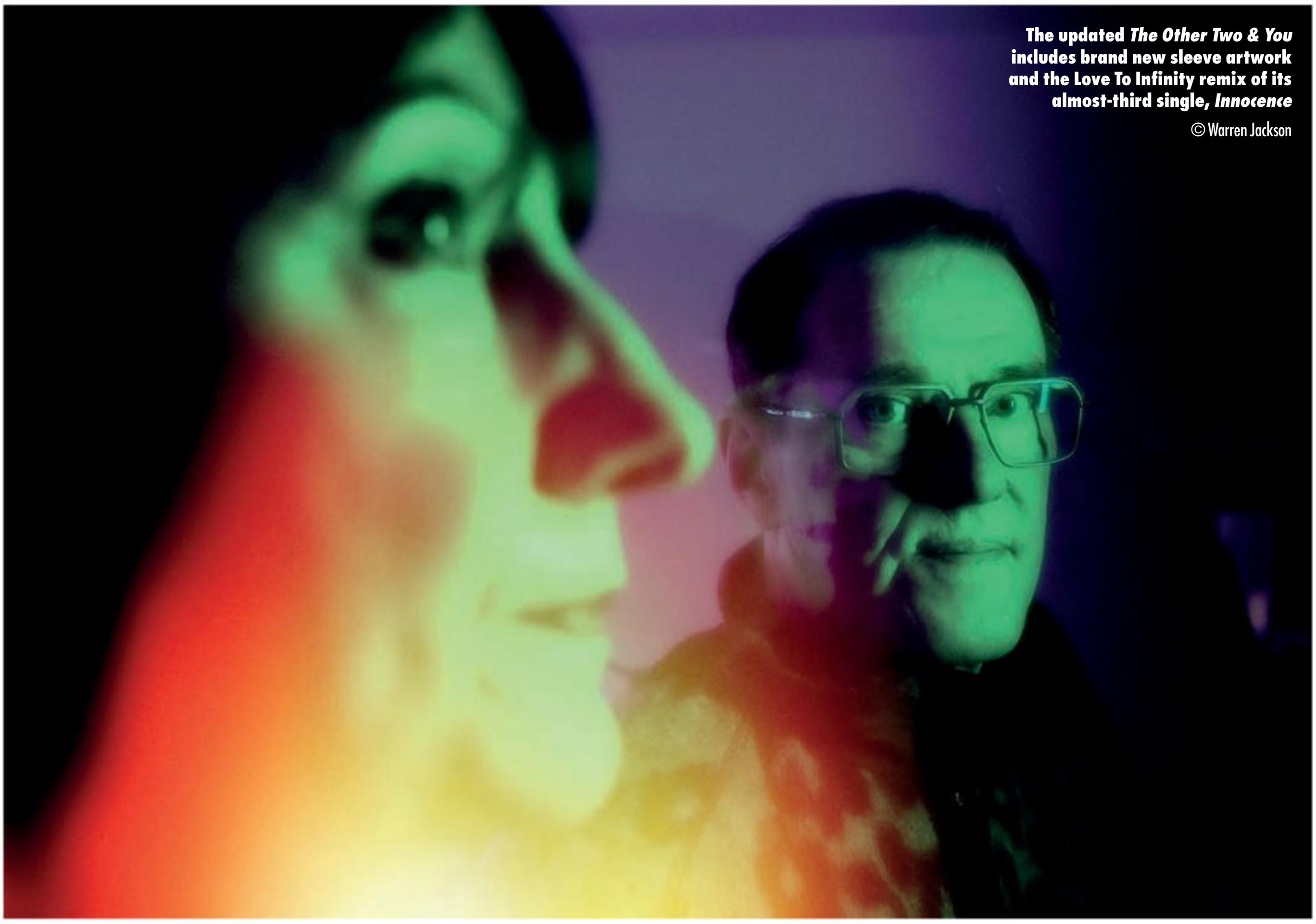
Repeat visit: Over three decades after its original release, husband-and-wife duo Stephen Morris and Gillian Gilbert's debut LP, *The Other Two & You*, has been reissued
© Warren Jackson

"I didn't think four people doing a soundtrack at the same time would have worked anyway," says Gilbert. "We didn't know what we were doing, but it got me and Stephen writing a lot of music. We got professional about soundtracks later, learning how to write to a scene."

Rather than working at New Order's increasingly sedate pace, the couple would have a week to score each of the series' eight episodes. "That was fine," breezes Stephen. "One of the hardest ideas in music is: 'What do you write a song about?' When someone sticks a video in front of you and says they want something to go with it, that's half a song done straight away. We then ended up with loads of two-minute pieces of music."

Two years later, in 1991, The Other Two released their debut single, *Tasty Fish*. By then, New Order had turned Morris and Gilbert's theme for Janet Street-Porter's documentary series *Reportage* into their only UK No.1 single, *World In Motion*, for England's 1990 World Cup team.

Tony Wilson's business partner, Alan Erasmus – "The man of mystery at Factory," as Morris accurately summarises – suggested the pair turn their TV incidental music into a soundtrack album.



The updated *The Other Two & You* includes brand new sleeve artwork and the Love To Infinity remix of its almost-third single, *Innocence*

© Warren Jackson

“THE OTHER TWO WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A SOUNDTRACK ALBUM. FOR SOME REASON WE DECIDED TO TRY TURNING IT INTO SONGS.”

GILLIAN GILBERT

Recording locations for *The Other Two & You* included Real World Studios near Bath

“That’s what The Other Two was supposed to be: a soundtrack album,” says Gillian. “For some reason, we decided to then try turning it all into songs instead.”

The fizzing instrumental for *Tasty Fish,* as raved-up as *Technique* and twice as poppy, was an obvious choice to become a proper song. Sharing a record label with Kim Wilde, the instrumental reached her dad, Marty Wilde. “Marty said *Tasty Fish* was a really good track, something Kim would sound great on,” explains Gilbert. “That got Tony Wilson interested. Kim came to our studio, did some great ‘Do-do-do’ melodies and… that was it. Kim was lovely, but we’d naively thought that, because she’s a singer, she’d have come in with lyrics ready and turn it into a song on the spot.”

Stephen takes over the story of the whereabouts of The Other Two’s missing third: “What happened with Kim happens a lot with us: we were too awkward to follow it up. We assumed someone would ring us and say: ‘We’ve booked this studio and Kim is coming in on that day.’ Kim probably thought the same: our people would call her people.” Gilbert: “The trouble is, we didn’t have any people.”

FISHING FOR LYRICS

Thus began Gilbert’s alternative career as a frontwoman. She’s got Chris Lowe levels of mystique behind her keyboards on stage but just like her Pet Shop Boys counterpart, Gillian is a total hoot when not being an international pop enigma. And Morris is one of life’s great eccentrics, reminiscent of Bob Mortimer as he rattles off surrealist insights.

Together, they’re absolute couples goals and their main interest seems to be to make each other laugh as frequently as possible. Telling the story of The Other Two is just an excuse for further mischief.

New Order producer Stephen Hague suggested Gilbert do the vocals herself: “He was so encouraging – I enjoyed singing. Lyrics, that was another matter.” Bernard Sumner was perhaps not the ideal role model, according to Gillian: “Watching Bernard write lyrics in the studio, you think: ‘God, that looks tortuous.’ We fell into thinking that you can’t write lyrics unless you’ve been tortured. I tried torturing myself for a bit, but that didn’t work. It wasn’t the easiest of processes.”

To highlight how un-tortured The Other Two were as artistes, *Tasty Fish* was named after a favourite chip shop in nearby Stockport. Stephen: “To this day, I don’t know why the hell we called it *Tasty Fish.* Good publicity for the chippy, I guess.” Gillian: “It was in the great tradition of New Order: give it a title that’s nothing to do with the song.”

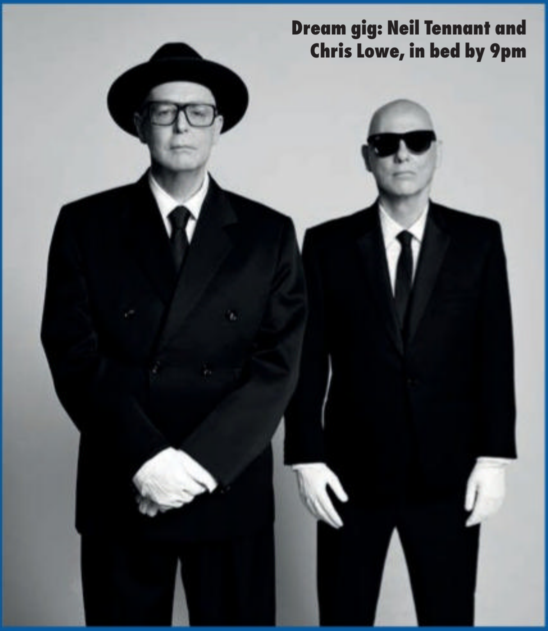
Pet *Sounds*

While New Order are playing shows in August at Cardiff Bay and Manchester Wythenshawe Park, there is still no sign of their first new material since 2020's lockdown single *Be A Rebel.*

"I feel embarrassed to say it but, no, there isn't any new music," says Stephen. "Our boxsets are continuing, though, and they take up a lot of time." A deluxe version of 1986's fourth album *Brotherhood* – "The one with *Bizarre Love Triangle* on, which is how I remember it" – will be out in time for Christmas. Camcorder footage by Morris of the band recording the album and touring Japan has been turned into a documentary for the boxset.

In addition, after Pet Shop Boys told *Classic Pop* last year that they would love to repeat their US joint tour with New Order over here, Stephen and Gillian agree it'd be a fine idea. "It may very well happen – it seems so obvious, doesn't it?" says Stephen. "There was nearly a joint show this year, but the venue wasn't finished being built in time."

Gilbert explains: "Pet Shop Boys are lovely people and the shows with them were so good. The ones they enjoyed most were when we went on last, because it meant they could be in bed by 9pm. Hopefully we can do something with them here [in the UK], even if it's a one-off, as they were really special."



Dream gig: Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe, in bed by 9pm

Stephen and Gillian in 1993, the year their debut finally reached the shops after Factory's collapse

GOING OFF

The single reached UK No.41. "We've got quite a few conspiracy theories about that," laughs Gilbert. "My sister was living in London. She told me *Tasty Fish* was on Radio 1 all the time – but that you couldn't buy the single anywhere. I'm not sure if that's because Factory couldn't afford to press more or, as we later found out, Tony Wilson just wasn't into us that much. He was telling people: 'It's just too poppy, loves.'"

"Even Quincy Jones was intrigued," remembers Morris. "He was the head of New Order's record company in the States. He came over to take New Order out to dinner and asked us: 'Do you know anything about this *Tasty Fish* song? It's being played in all the roller discos, and apparently it's not even signed!' It was a brilliant week when it looked like it might be a hit."

It led to The Other Two's first promo video: "That was the worst part about that song being called *Tasty Fish,*" grimaces Stephen. "The director filled the set full of fish. The fish arrived at 9am, then weren't used until 7pm. No fridge, hot studio lights... *awful.*"

The experience was even worse for Gillian. "New Order had a 'No miming' policy," she says. "I was terrible at miming in that video and just hated it. More than anything, that's what made me think: 'Oh God, can I just go back to being in the background?' Of course, New Order mime all the time on TV shows now."

When it looked like *Tasty Fish* might go into the Top 40, possibly resulting in a *Top Of The Pops* appearance, Gilbert and Morris began contemplating how to make The Other Two work live. A Certain Ratio's Jez Kerr, who sang backing vocals on the single, would play bass. A female drummer was hired, and rehearsals began on *Tasty Fish* for potential TV performances.

"I do regret The Other Two never played live," confesses Stephen. "I think if we had actually gone on *Top Of The Pops* and done that first live performance, we would have considered it more seriously." Gillian nods in agreement, adding: "It wasn't me thinking: 'I'm not doing it,' it was about building up our nerves to doing something new. With videos: it was awful, but I'm glad I did it. Playing live, we never quite took that next step."

JAZZED UP

The band's debut album, *The Other Two & You,* was soon completed – but remained unreleased for two years. With Factory going under, New Order needed to get back together, and quickly, to try to save the label. As Morris notes: "I've got a theory: if you want New Order to do anything, tell them that The Other Two are about to release an album."

Somewhat to the duo's surprise, *The Other Two & You* has just been reissued by Warner. The album had previously been re-released by Factory associate James Nice's labels, LTM and Factory Benelux, in 2010 and 2020. Stephen cautions: "It was allegedly remastered then, but I honestly didn't do it, as I didn't have time. Warner said they'd get it remastered properly this time. Then they asked us if we had the masters and, well..."

When *The Other Two & You* was first due out on Factory in 1991, Morris took the album to "the one cutting plant that

"If you want New Order to do anything, tell them The Other Two are about to release an album"
Stephen Morris

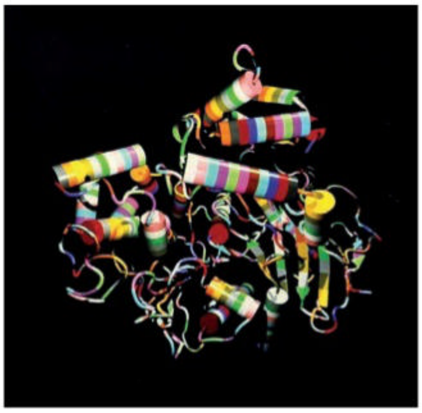
Factory wasn't blacklisted by." It was a swish facility, with two adjacent studios. "When I collected The Other Two record, I took it home, put the needle down and it was all..." He starts doing an impression of parping bebop jazz. "I was going: 'They've put sax all over it! What's going on?' The pressing plant was working on Courtney Pine's album in the next studio. They'd sent us his, and ours had gone to Courtney Pine. Good job I checked, or else New Order fans would've been going: 'That's nothing like *Tasty Fish*, those two really have changed direction.'"

Once Factory had been taken over by London Records, New Order's new home suggested *The Other Two & You* should wait until New Order's new album was out. Eventually, the pair's debut emerged five months after *Republic*, in October 1993.

"Listening to it again, *The Other Two & You* isn't as bad as I'd expected it would be," deadpans Stephen. "Some of it is 'What the bloody hell were we thinking!?', but some of it is actually really good." Gilbert adds: "Bernard said we were very catchy once. I don't know if he meant that in a good way or not. And Hooky had told us about one of the songs: 'That's a very complicated bass riff. It's got too many notes in it.'"

Once second single *Selfish* stalled at No.46, London's interest waned. A dark drama, *Selfish* is most similar lyrically to New Order, though Gillian deflects any interest in who "Someone I hate, she thinks she's great" is written about. "Our daughter asked that!" she grins. "I told her: 'You don't want to know.' When I started writing lyrics, it became quite personal. Listening now, those lyrics are a bit creepy. I'll just say that it's about someone from the past."

The new reissue includes a previously unreleased mix by Love To Infinity of *Innocence*, which would have been the third single from the record. The album could also have featured a different hit. After Moby was hired to remix *Movin' On*, at Morris' suggestion he made it sound like: "Kraftwerk, if they were a country and western band."



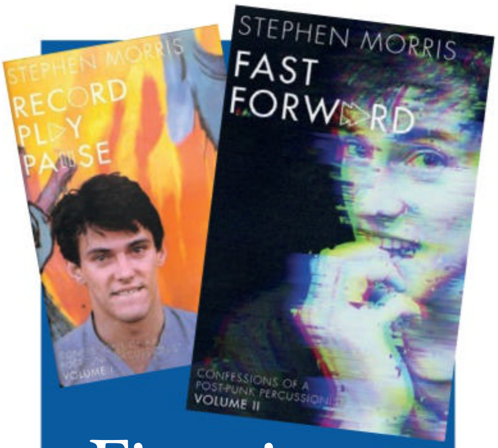
The result was so catchy that London thought it a smash. "You could see the pound signs in their eyes," says Stephen. "Then a certain person, sat next to me now, told them: 'If you think I'm getting dressed up in denim and a cowboy hat, with a pig under my arm, you've got another thing coming." A highly amused Gilbert admits: "Maybe I should have done it. It sounded like *Cotton Eyed Joe*, only years before Rednex did it."

Six years on, the duo's second album *Super Highways* (pictured above) arrived – after *Making Out* producer John Chapman reappeared, asking The Other Two to soundtrack his latest BBC1 series, Edward Woodward and Kathy Burke's refuse collection drama *Common As Muck*.

Sub Sub singer Melanie Williams helped with lyrics on album two. "When Melanie started incorporating my ideas into her lyrics, that was great for my confidence," Gilbert emphasises. "The more I went on, the more confidence I had. The songs are better on *Super Highways*." Morris: "I prefer it, too. The only thing that's a pain – and it's my fault – is I was obsessed with drum and bass, so the production is a bit dated. That album will be getting reissued soon, too."

Although The Other Two's name has since been on occasional remixes for Nine Inch Nails and Tim Burgess, there's yet to be a third album. New Order's return has stymied that. But Gillian hints: "There could be something. Around 2010, we started a new album. Since we began these reissues, Stephen has been digitising the tapes of those unreleased songs. I've come in and gone: 'What's that? It's really good!' It turns out it's us. There's probably enough there for an EP." Why didn't they finish making it? "New Order started making *Music Complete*. Like Stephen said, if you want New Order to start something..." ■

● **The reissue of *The Other Two & You* is out now on Warner and reviewed on page 91**



Fine time *for a book*

After writing memoirs about Joy Division and New Order in, respectively, *Record Play Pause* and *Fast Forward*, Stephen Morris has been considering ideas for a novel... and a sitcom.

"I've got ideas and titles for eight episodes," Morris reveals. "I'm not giving the idea away, just in case it ever gets made. I would love to do a sitcom, but it's much harder work than a book. I'd have to get it in production, think about casting... Every time I think about it seriously, I start telling myself: 'Just write a fucking book instead.'"

Meanwhile, Gillian will be the final member of New Order to tell her side of the band's story, but with a difference. Shortly before Christmas, Gilbert is releasing a book of photographs. "It's not: 'I was born in 1961 and went to school at...'," she explains. "I tried writing and didn't enjoy it. I did photography at polytechnic and it'll be a different type of book. I've been going through all my old photographs and I'm doing it this way instead. I've really enjoyed that."

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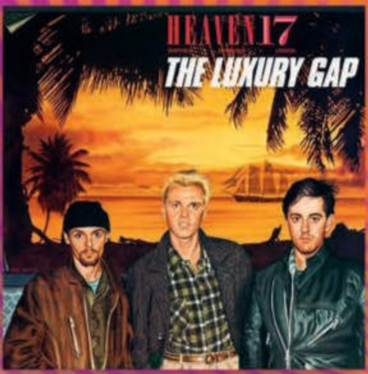

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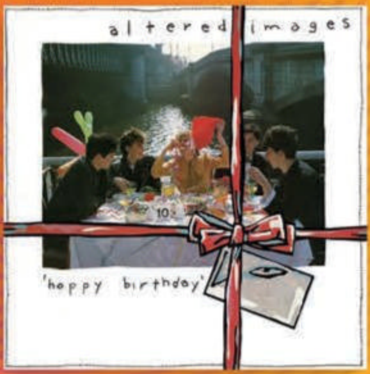

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CLASSIC POP TOP TEN

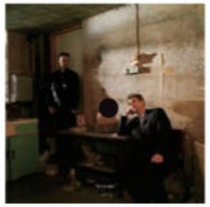
WEEK ENDING 11 JULY 1987

PET SHOP BOYS FASHION A GAY ANTHEM, A-HA FALL OUT WITH JOHN BARRY AND THE UK FINALLY SUCCUMBS TO THE CHARMS OF AUSSIE LEDGE JOHN FARNHAM

STEVE O'BRIEN

01 (1) **IT'S A SIN**
PET SHOP BOYS
(PARLOPHONE)

02 (3) **BRUCE WILLIS**
UNDER THE BOARDWALK
(MOTOWN)



IT'S A SIN
PET SHOP BOYS
(PARLOPHONE)

Neil Tennant may not have conceived Pet Shop Boys' first single off second LP *Actually* to be as issue-defining as it became ("the song was written in about 15 minutes, and was intended as a camp joke. It wasn't something I consciously took very seriously," he told *Out* in 2009), but since its release in June '87, *It's A Sin* has become something of a gay anthem, so much so that Russell T Davies picked it as the title of his 2021 drama chronicling the 80s AIDS crisis.

Neil and Chris Lowe actually won a lawsuit against singer-songwriter, TV presenter (and future felon) Jonathan King, who in his *Sun* column accused the pair of pilfering *It's A Sin*'s melody from Cat Stevens' 1970 song *Wild World*. The duo sued King, who settled out of court, after which Tennant and Lowe donated the money to charity. The video would be the Pets' first collaboration with arthouse titan Derek Jarman, and features Tennant under arrest by an inquisition with Lowe as his jailer. Look out for Academy Award-nominated actor Ron (*Oliver!*) Moody in the role of the judge.

WISHING WELL
TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY (CBS)

The second hit for The Artist Formerly Known as Terence Trent D'Arby (now Sananda Maitreya), *Wishing Well* was one of many highlights of the singer's debut long-player, *Introducing The Hardline According To Terence Trent D'Arby*. Written with the late Sean Oliver, who had been in the band Rip Rig & Panic with Neneh Cherry (he died in 1990), it was produced by D'Arby with Heaven 17's Martyn Ware and penned, the vocalist admitted in *The Billboard Book Of Number One Hits*, "when I was in a half-asleep, half-awake state of mind", and that he "liked the feel of the words". The song would make D'Arby a star in the United States (previous single *If You Let Me Stay* only made No.68), peaking at No.1, his only chart-topper in his homeland.

UNDER THE BOARDWALK
BRUCE WILLIS
(MOTOWN)

Certainly, the Bruce Willis of 1987 was not someone lacking in chutzpah. Who else, on the back of their starring role in one of TV's most popular detective shows (that would be *Moonlighting*), would have the balls to release an album – on the Motown label for God's sake – chockful of soul classics? No one would claim, however, that Willis' takes on The Staple Singers' *Respect Yourself* or The Coasters' *Young Blood* were better than the originals, and that includes this misconceived cover of The Drifters' 1964 favourite. Despite flopping in the US (it made No.59) it was a surprise hit in the UK, peaking at No.2, outperforming The Drifters' version by an incredible 43 chart positions. People, eh?

STAR TREKKIN'
THE FIRM
(BARK)

There are few No.1s from the past more likely to elicit a bewildered "*This* was a No.1?!" response from Gen Z than this batty novelty single from The Firm. Now more likely to be heard pumping out of the speakers at a *Star Trek* convention disco, *Star Trekkin'* seemed to be everywhere in the summer of 1987, and spent two weeks at the summit of the UK Singles Chart. It was the second 45 for the band after 1982's *Minder*-referencing *Arthur Daley, E's Alright* ("*This* was No.14?!"). The group (which included Bark Studios founder John O'Connor and guitarist Grahame Lister) wrote the song in tribute to Gene Roddenberry's iconic sci-fi series, and its release coincided with the announcement of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, so Star Trek was very much in the air at the time, no doubt helping this frankly terrible piece of garbage to the top of the UK charts.

03 (2) **STAR TREKKIN'**
THE FIRM
(BARK)

04 (5) **WISHING WELL**
TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY
(CBS)

05 (17) **THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS**
A-HA
(WARNER BROS)

06 (10) **MY PRETTY ONE**
CLIFF RICHARD
(EMI)

07 (16) **ALWAYS**
ATLANTIC STARR
(WARNER BROS)

08 (4) **I WANNA DANCE WITH SOMEBODY (WHO LOVES ME) WHITNEY HOUSTON**
(ARISTA)

09 (6) **YOU'RE THE VOICE**
JOHN FARNHAM
(WHEATLEY)

10 (7) **MISFIT (1987)**
CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT
(MERCURY)

THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS
A-HA
(WARNER BROS)

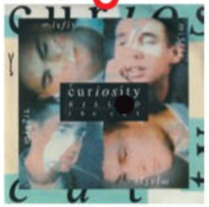
Picking that year's hottest pop band clearly worked for the James Bond producers in 1985 when they chose Duran Duran to perform the theme song for Roger Moore's final bow *A View To A Kill*. So, with new 007 Timothy Dalton's debut outing, Eon Productions plumped for Norway's finest for a track the band's Pål Waaktaar-Savoy would write with regular Bond man John Barry. But despite the brilliant results, Waaktaar-Savoy admitted they often butted heads. "It was down to a clash in mentalities," he told the *NME*. "His mentality was the way it was and it surfaced in various ways. None of us agreed with his worldview and the way he spoke about other human beings. We couldn't speak a common language... But his input in the song was essentially just making a few changes to the verse melody: the rest was already there."

ALWAYS
ATLANTIC STARR
(WARNER BROS)

To British audiences in the 1980s Atlantic Starr appeared like a band who'd only popped up in 1986, enjoying their first big UK hit that year with the glitzy *Secret Lovers*. But in fact, the R&B outfit had been going since 1976 and had already put out six albums by the time of that song. Not that they had much more success in their native United States with only 1982's *Circles* making the Top 40. *Always*, lifted from the group's seventh studio LP *All In The Name Of Love*, would be their biggest success, however, peaking at US No.1 and UK No.3. They never had another UK hit (though 1994's *Everybody's Got Summer* made No.36) but they're still going and released their 14th album, *Metamorphosis*, in 2017.

YOU'RE THE VOICE
JOHN FARNHAM
(WHEATLEY)

In the UK, John Farnham may be the definition of a one-hit wonder, but in Australia he's a bona fide phenomenon, having released 21 studio albums, six live LPs and 74 singles. But even so, it's *You're The Voice* that he will be remembered for, and its accompanying album, *Whispering Jack*, remains Australia's third biggest-selling LP of all time.



MISFIT (1987)
CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT
(MERCURY)

Best remembered for its Andy Warhol-directed, Bob Dylan-referencing video, *Misfit* originally stiffed at No.76 in 1986. Re-released after the success of *Down To Earth* and *Ordinary Day*, it made No.7 second time round. CKTC would enjoy one more Top 10 after this in the shape of 1992's *Hang On In There Baby*, by which time they'd shortened their name to simply Curiosity.

MY PRETTY ONE
CLIFF RICHARD
(EMI)

Nobody could accuse the Cliff Richard of 1987 of not moving with the times. Despite hitting 47 that year, pop music's Peter Pan wasn't afraid to embrace the era, and while this synth-fuelled single doesn't hit OMD levels of brilliance, it's a world away from the granny-pleasing antics of *The Millennium Prayer*. Written by Cliff regular Alan Tarney, it was first recorded by Jamie Rae, though Cliff didn't know at the time that it was a cover. "If it's similar, it can't be the vocals because I've never heard his," he reflected on a Baktabak Interview Picture Disc. "Alan Tarney produced his record, too, so the production might be... The only difference is that I'm No.6 and he never made it."

I WANNA DANCE WITH SOMEBODY (WHO LOVES ME) WHITNEY HOUSTON
(ARISTA)

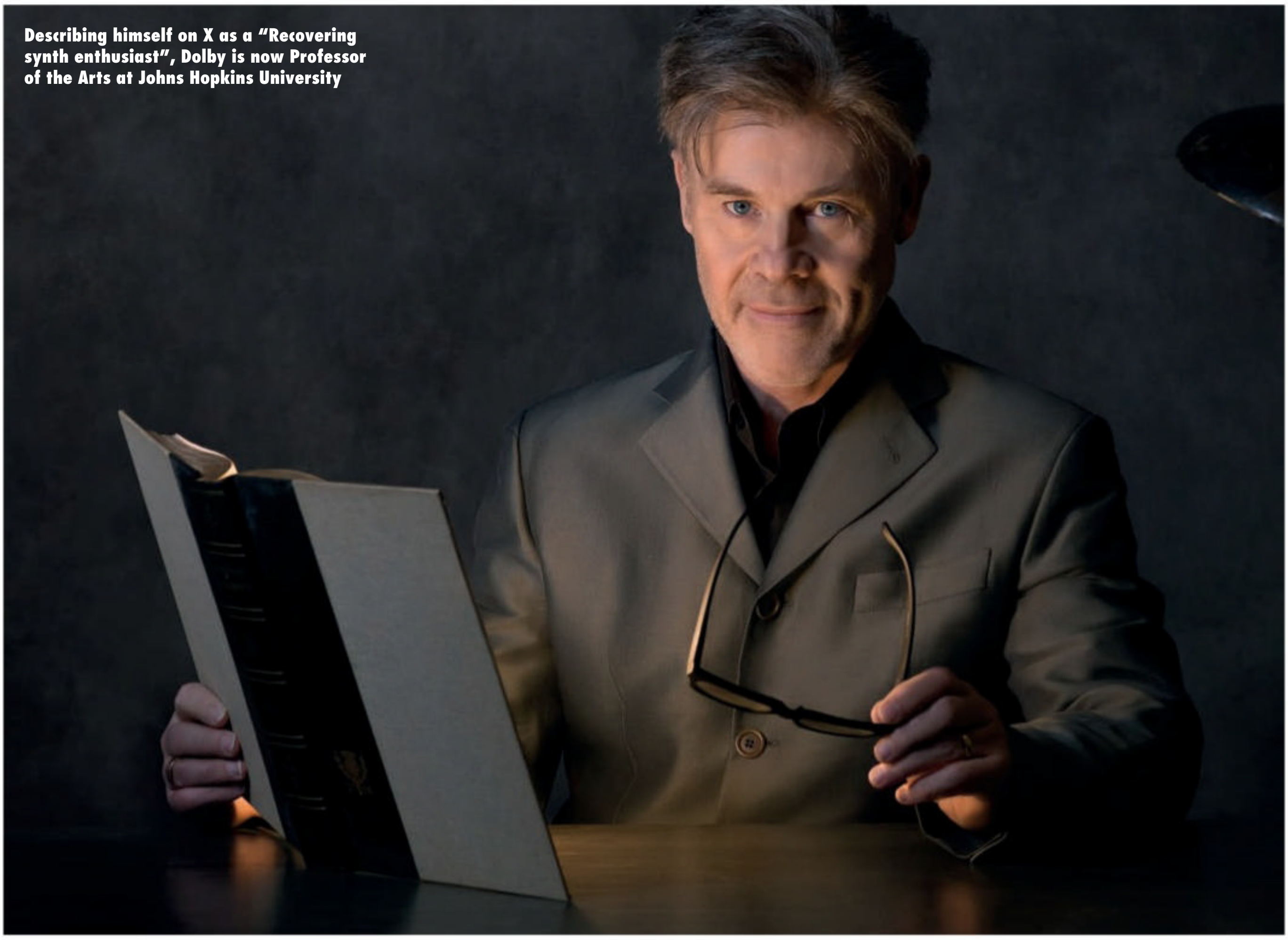
So iconic that the makers of 2022's biopic of Whitney chose it as their title, *I Wanna Dance With Somebody* was written by George Merrill and Shannon Rubicam, aka Boy Meets Girl. The pair had already penned 1985's *How Will I Know* for Houston, and so were seen by her label Arista as reliable hit-makers. *I Wanna Dance With Somebody* was the lead single from her second album, but it wasn't initially seen favourably by producer Narada Michael Walden: "It reminded me of a rodeo song with Olivia Newton-John singing," he said in the book *One Moment In Time*. "I love Olivia Newton-John, but for Whitney Houston, it didn't seem right. I felt the song needed a much funkier feel... we just jumped in the water and lo and behold a magic record was born."

Hyperactive! – After varied and numerous other projects, synth-pop's tech-savvy scientist returns to the stages of the UK

"I HAVE AN EXHIBITIONIST STREAK, BUT I DON'T NEED THE APPLAUSE

IN THE 80s HE WAS THE MAD PROFESSOR OF SYNTH, NOW TURNED *ACTUAL* PROFESSOR. AS THOMAS DOLBY TAKES A BREAK FROM ACADEMIA FOR A SERIES OF LIVE DATES IN HIS NATIVE UK, WE TALK AI, MUSICAL RESURRECTIONS AND, ER, SAILING NOVELS WITH ONE OF POP'S MOST CEREBRAL ARTISTS... **STEVE O'BRIEN**

Pop star, record producer, film composer, tech entrepreneur, author, academic, filmmaker... few people embody the phrase 'renaissance man' more than Thomas Dolby. In the last 10 years alone, he has put out a best-selling memoir (2016's *The Speed Of Sound: Breaking The Barriers Between Music And Technology*), joined the famed Johns Hopkins University as lecturer and written his first novel, of which more later. And now, if that wasn't diary-busting enough, Dolby is about to go on the road for a series of dates around North America as part of the Totally Tubular tour (alongside the likes of Tom Bailey, Modern English, Bow Wow Wow and others), and six headline shows in his native UK. A rarity indeed.



Describing himself on X as a "Recovering synth enthusiast", Dolby is now Professor of the Arts at Johns Hopkins University

"THERE'S A THIN LINE BETWEEN AN ARTIST THAT'S VIEWED AS JUST MILKING THAT RETRO THING VERSUS SOMEBODY THAT'S STILL RELEVANT AND AUTHENTIC..."

"I don't play live very much these days," Dolby tells *Classic Pop* from his home in Baltimore. "I've just really enjoyed teaching these past few years. I left school at 16 but I'm from a long line of Oxford and Cambridge professors. Only the other day someone said to me I'd finally joined the family firm!"

DOWN TO A SCIENCE

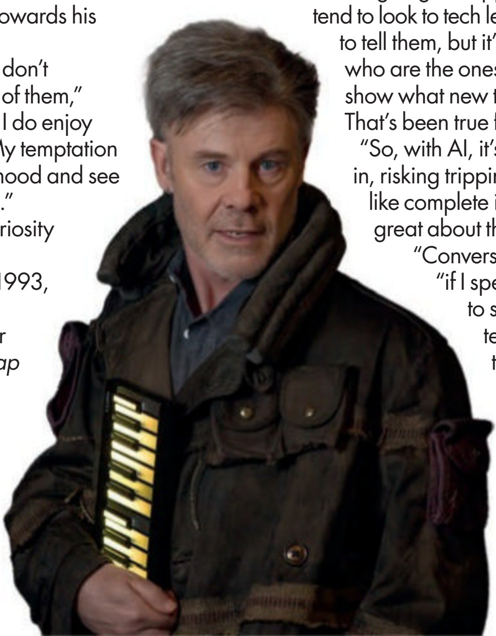
So what, we ask, does the composer of *She Blinded Me With Science* and *Hyperactive!* put as his profession on official forms these days? For a committed polymath like Dolby, it could be anything.

"Well, if you put 'musician' the premium will go up," he laughs. "Whereas with 'teacher' or 'educator' you might get a discount, so I tend to do that these days. But not all pull-down menus have 'Professor' in them, which is very annoying when you're trying to get a good table at a restaurant."

That the pop maverick known as Thomas Dolby (real name: Thomas Morgan Robertson) ended up in academia isn't such a great surprise, as there was always something quite scholarly about him. Whereas many of his chart peers were circling themselves with leggy supermodels in their videos, there Dolby was – in the *She Blinded Me With Science* promo – sharing screen time with TV egghead Dr Magnus Pyke. Even the singer's short-lived alias – Booker T Boffin – nodded towards his own slightly bookish air.

"I do a lot of things, but I don't purport to be brilliant at all of them," Dolby says, modestly. "But I do enjoy learning something new. My temptation is always to dig under the hood and see how the whole thing works."

It's this kind of restless curiosity that led to Dolby forming a company, Headspace, in 1993, specialising in interactive audio technology, while for his last album, 2011's *A Map Of The Floating City*, he built an online game that allowed people to explore the record's songs and characters.



In 2012, Dolby was honoured with a Moog Innovation Award for his pioneering synth work

It's why, unlike so many of his generation (he's now 65), he's welcoming of the opportunities developing technologies, such as AI, offer in terms of creating art.

"Often new technologies come along and make a lot of noise and people get paranoid," he suggests. "Nobody knows what's going to happen next, so they tend to look to tech leaders and politicians to tell them, but it's actually artists who are the ones who step up and show what new technologies are for. That's been true for centuries.

"So, with AI, it's for the artist to dive in, risking tripping up and looking like complete idiots, to show what's great about this new tech.

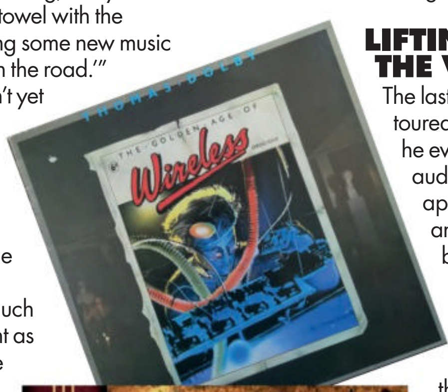
"Conversely," he continues, "if I spend time going back to something tried and tested, and it's been thoroughly explored by others, I feel like I am wasting opportunities to work with new technologies."

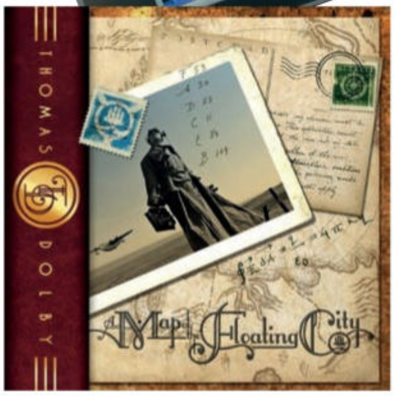
THE REAL McCOY

For the moment, the determinedly forward-looking Dolby is, for once, harking back to the past, with a place on the nostalgically-driven Totally Tubular tour which kicks off in Seattle in June, taking in L.A., Phoenix, Boston and Washington DC. While his UK gigs will be tailored for the hardcore, these Tubular shows promise a hits-heavy set.

"It's a walk down memory lane, but there is a delicate balance," he says about mixing in the occasional obscure cut with the chart-friendly favourites. "There's a thin line between an artist that's viewed as milking that retro thing versus somebody that's still relevant and authentic. I'm fairly unique in the sense that I never broke up or have been in and out of rehab. With me, you know you're getting the real McCoy. The question is whether it can spark an interest that would lead to me thinking, 'Maybe it's time to throw in the towel with the teaching and making some new music and getting back on the road.'"

Though Dolby isn't yet making new albums and lining his diary with tour dates, he is more involved in music now than he was in the 90s and Noughties, when much of his time was spent as CEO of Headspace (later Beatnik). From popstar to businessman wasn't a wild career swerve for Dolby, as he was never, by his own admission, as fame-thirsty as some of his more extroverted peers.





"I have an exhibitionist streak, but I don't need the applause," he admits. "So in a period when I'm not making music, it's not like I'm just jonesing to get out there. I've had offers to go out and do things, but they seem to come in waves.

"When I look at some of my contemporaries, they appear to be residing in the 'where are they now?' files, then suddenly they'll have this enormous comeback and enormous hit out of the blue – it's fantastic when that happens. I look at Kate Bush, for example – what a phenomenal story that was with *Stranger Things*. Anybody would dream of having that wave of interest. That's a motive to make new music and get back out there.

"For a lot of, let's say, legacy artists," he adds, "it's intimidating, because you worry, maybe my best years are behind me, maybe I'm going to do something mediocre, and people are going to slag it off, saying, 'It's not 1982 anymore.'

"But you have to forgive yourself for growing up, and forgive your audience for growing up and not wanting to get in your pants anymore. You have to be willing to take a deep breath and say, 'Yeah, I'm going to do it anyway.'"

Those Brit-based Dolby-heads who will be booking tickets for his one-man shows later this year should expect a deeper dive into the singer's rich catalogue than those at Tubular will experience. The last time we spoke to Dolby, he described his fanbase as, "compared to the average... quite literate, thoughtful and articulate," those who, presumably, will want something more than a faithful recreation of whatever track he's playing. "I tend to take people under the hood to unpack the songs," he reveals. "Sometimes I will loop-record them in and build on layers so that people can hear the individual components. And sometimes I'll tell stories about the songs."

LIFTING THE VEIL

The last time Dolby toured back in 2014 he even invited audience members to approach the stage and pick ping pong balls out of a hat, each of which had a different song title printed on them. He would then, "pick the songs to pieces, playing some of the individual parts and explaining how I recorded them", bringing a little of that lecture hall learnedness to a pop gig.

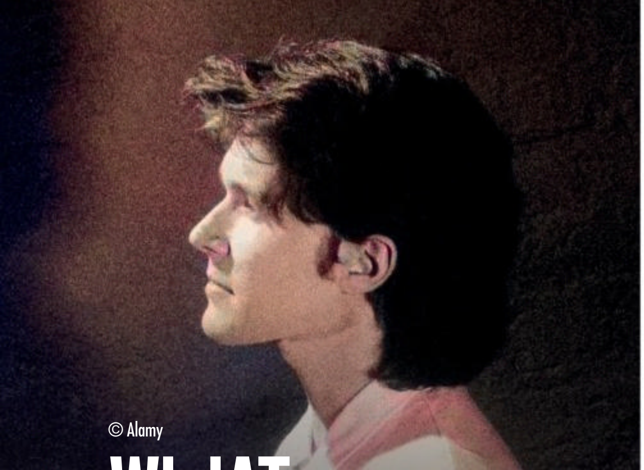
"I think my audiences really appreciated dropping the fourth wall, and taking them on the inside," he smiles. "As time goes on, people that have lived with this music for years become increasingly interested in the stories behind them. In those situations, I tend to go for the deeper cuts, songs like *Screen Kiss*, *I Love You Goodbye*, *Airwaves* and *Oceanea*, which were never the most played on the radio. They didn't chart as singles, but they were the songs [the audience] got most fired up about and were most affectionate about. It's not *She Blinded Me With Science* or *Hyperactive!*. I think my audience accepts that's the commercial end of what I do and I've always got that element up my sleeve. I have fun with those more superficial, frilly songs, but mainly I see them as a springboard to get people into the deeper cuts."

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES

Though Thomas Dolby is still awaiting a *Stranger Things/Running Up That Hill* moment, in the 80s and 90s his songs graced a number of films, including *Howard The Duck*, *FernGully: The Last Rainforest* and *Toys*. Not only that, but he was also hired as composer for a number of movies, including 1985 drama *Fever Pitch* and 1986's Ken Russell-directed *Gothic*, a historical horror telling the story of Percy and Mary Shelley's visit to Lord Byron in Villa Diodati by Lake Geneva in 1816.

"It's my most comprehensive film score," Dolby says, "but it wasn't a great experience. It was eye-opening, because it was the first time I'd worked with an orchestra, which in this case was the London Symphony Orchestra – but unfortunately I was paying them! It's a wonderful thing to hear an orchestra playing your music, but when you're the one paying for the overtime, that's not good news.

"A few other musicians have [moved into film scoring], people like Danny Elfman, Trent Reznor, Mark Mothersbaugh... They've been really successful crossing over, into a world that was quite stuffy. It's less so now, but there used to be a feeling in the Hollywood film-scoring community that an untrained musician from the rock world doesn't really know what they're doing. In reality, some of the most exciting scores have been made by that route in the last 20-30 years, rather than the John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith-type community. I think now in Hollywood, it's accepted. It's like, you don't have to be a conservatory-trained musician in order to be able to make good film scores."



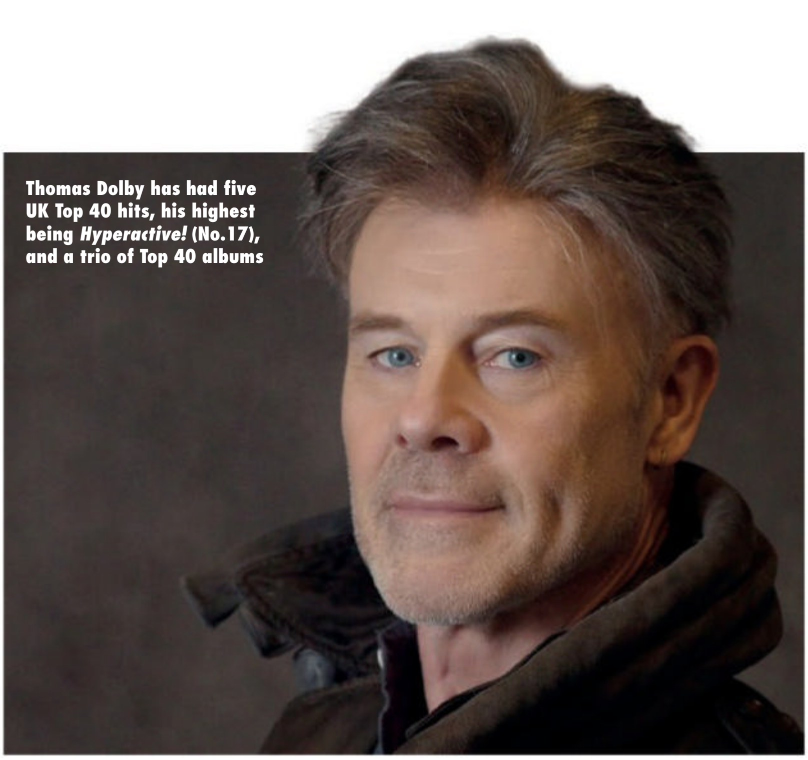
© Alamy

WHAT WOULD DAVID SYLVIAN DO?

With five albums and various film and video game scores to his name, there's a wealth of music that Dolby can choose from when planning a setlist. But while certain songs choose themselves, there must be others he thinks are just as good, if not better, than those world-conquering chart hits. So does he have one song in his back catalogue he wishes was as well-known as *She Blinded Me With Science*?

"My record companies never really had the balls to take a song like *Screen Kiss* or *I Love You Goodbye* and put that out front and say, 'This is the song that you should be listening to'. In the UK, they tended to pander to a BBC producer's A-list mentality, and go, 'Well, this wouldn't fit in the radio'. In the era after I first hit, I think, the media became more eclectic, and it became not so taboo to put the industry's weight behind something that's a little bit unusual.

"There is depth to my music, but also this more accessible, more extroverted fringe with those songs [like *She Blinded Me With Science*]. So if you're a record company, you're always going to go with those because you think they sound more like other stuff on the radio. I should have stuck to my guns, like David Sylvian post-Japan – he did his thing and it was gorgeous and totally uncommercial. He did it with great conviction, and any record company that wanted to release his records got that and never put pressure on him to write hit singles."



Thomas Dolby has had five UK Top 40 hits, his highest being *Hyperactive!* (No.17), and a trio of Top 40 albums

NEW GOLDEN AGE?

Despite a career stretching back to 1982, there are just five Thomas Dolby albums for the singer to pick from. That Tubular crowd may only crave the hits, but those at the solo shows will likely know every track from LPs as wilfully awkward as 1988's *Aliens Ate My Buick* (described in Dolby's book as "a crazy postcard home from a British expat on a debauched visit to Hollywood") to the genre-jumping *A Map Of The Floating City*. That album – his first in nearly two decades – was 13 years ago. Academia has, for now, taken priority.

"Every social media I post, regardless of the topic, there are going to be comments going, 'When do we get a new album?' and 'When are you coming to Indianapolis?' It's as if you're their property, and it's like, 'you owe us'. I can sort of understand that, but I think the majority of my audience understand that I have to keep things fresh. I've always been attracted to the new, new thing, whether it was making MTV videos or starting a software company, or doing video games and interactive stuff, making a film or now teaching."

Talking of new trades, the latest string to Dolby's bow is fiction-writing. Coinciding with his UK dates this summer, will be his first novel, a historical epic titled *Prevailing Wind* about the America's Cup (he's a keen sailor and is, he admits, "obsessed with classic yachts").

"I'm so out of my depth as a writer," he admits. "It's not my number one medium. Yet that's why it's exciting to me, because it's challenging. With music, I've kinda been there, done that."

So, does he ever think he's done with creating music? He ponders the question.

"Not to say I can't get back there," he says, "but if there's something else that's beckoning, where I have to learn new skills and find new ways to express myself, it's always my inclination to go that way. I think people who follow what I do, they get that about me, despite the few that feel I'm their property."

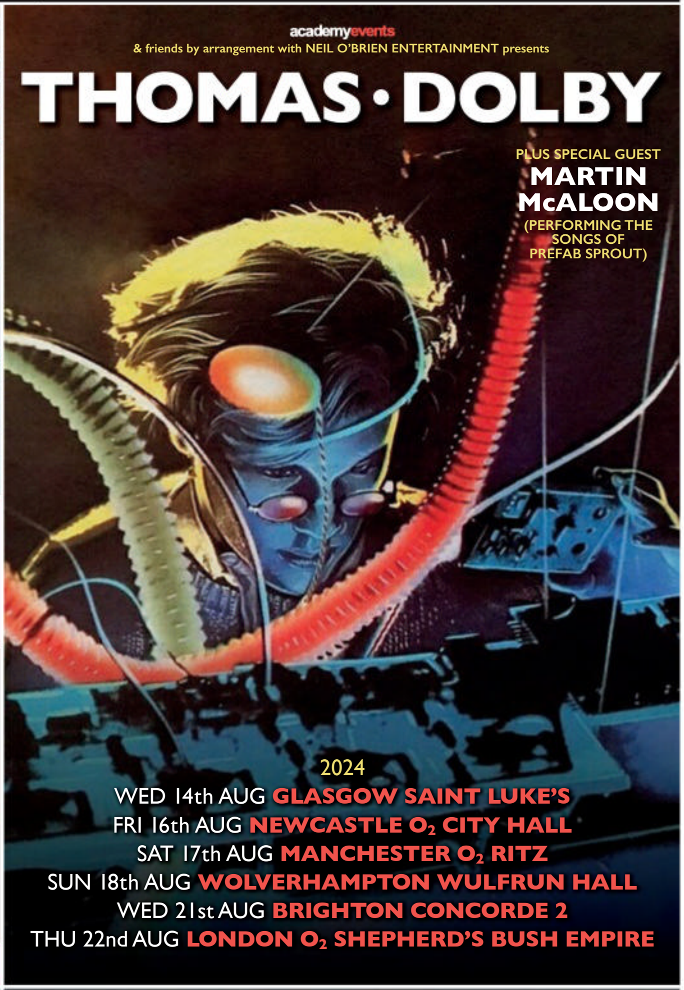
As regards a new album, well, that's really up to the gods. Dolby admits it's "not on the immediate horizon", but who knows? If, for instance, one of his older numbers got a *Running Up That Hill/Murder On The Dancefloor*-style revival owing to its use in some blockbuster film or TV show, he admits he could be tempted back. But until a *Stranger Things* or a *Saltburn* exhumes a Dolby classic like *Windpower* or *Field Work*, he's happy to teach, write, or do whatever new comes up.

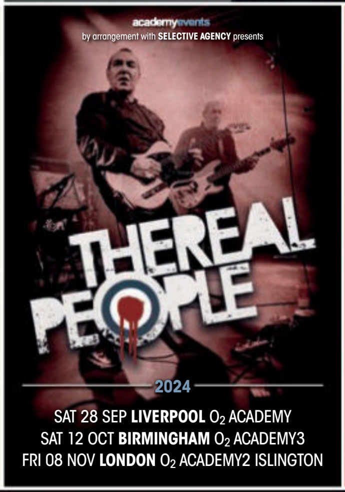
"I don't like blowing my own trumpet and getting up every day and having to make a splash about my own product," he says, "but if there was an upsurge of demand and I heard that sucking sound, it would encourage me."

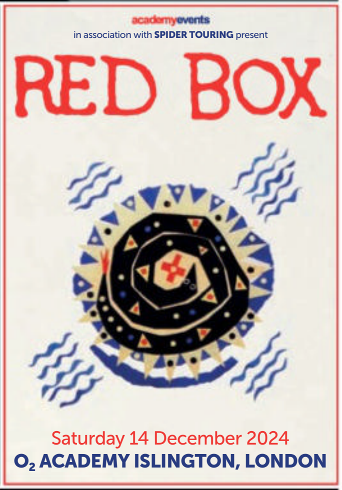
So there you go. If any movie or TV directors are reading, you could do a lot worse than raid the Thomas Dolby discography for your next project. Because if any 80s star deserves a second coming in the 2020s, it is synth-pop's nutty professor, blinding us with science one more time. ■

- **For details of live dates, visit thomasdolby.com**

Academy Events present







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TEARS FOR FEARS
EVERYBODY·LOVES·A·HAPPY·ENDING
ODY LOVES A HAPPY ENDING

TEARS FOR FEARS EVERYBODY LOVES A HAPPY ENDING

TEARS FOR FEARS' SIXTH ALBUM HERALDED A REUNION THAT'S NOW LASTED A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AND WARRANTS BELATED ACCLAIM FOR ITS SWAGGER AND CRAFT

WYNDHAM WALLACE

When Tears For Fears returned with 2022's *The Tipping Point*, it's not like it came out of the blue. This comeback represented the culmination of an increasingly triumphant, and lengthy reunion. Largely absent from the charts though they may have been – their last UK Top 10 single had been 1989's *Sowing The Seeds Of Love* – they had nonetheless kept themselves active. From 2010 they'd undertaken multiple tours covering much of the world, and in 2014 there'd been a covers EP, *Ready Boy & Girls?*, a self-proclaimed warm-up exercise for the ultimately prolonged making of their next album. Deluxe editions of their first three long-players, as well as a B-sides compilation, had also helped raise their profile, while in 2021 they received an Ivor Novello Award for their 'Outstanding Song Collection'.

People, in other words, weren't so much taken aback by the release of their seventh album as impatient to hear it. Hitting No.2 in the UK and the Top 10 in the United States, *The Tipping Point* provided a happy ending everyone could enjoy.

But this campaign had actually begun much earlier, back in 2004, when Tears For Fears were yesterday's news, considered symbolic of 80s pop's excess and far from an object of feverish anticipation. That their sixth album was made at all was something in itself. During the preceding years, Curt Smith would have literally crossed the street to avoid Roland Orzabal.

It was following the legendarily exorbitant three years of sessions for 1989's multi-platinum *The Seeds Of Love*, not to mention a subsequent world tour, that two, in a sense, became one. Orzabal's exacting studio methods are said to have contributed to Smith's departure, but the latter was also struggling with fame and the attendant demands of commercial expectations. He was in the process of divorcing his first wife, too, eager to start afresh in New York with his new partner. With Orzabal resenting the delays caused by his constant travelling, Smith consigned Tears For Fears to his former life.

To be fair, the band had also parted with their manager in 1990 – he'd be imprisoned in 2004 for defrauding investors with crushed volcanic rock masquerading as a drunkenness cure – and anyway, they'd been living out of one another's pockets for well over a decade. Having formed their first band, Graduate, as teenagers in 1978, it was perhaps only natural that both would eventually feel the need to flex their muscles and assert their artistic independence.

Smith soon settled down and made two solo albums, 1993's *Soul On Board* and 1999's *Aeroplane*. The first, which he's as good as disowned, failed to earn a US label, while the latter – outside North America, at least – was a self-released collection combining a six-track US-only EP and an album he'd put out that year under his touring band's name, Mayfield. None of it ruled the world.

Orzabal remained in his Bath hometown, persevering with the established brand. 1993's *Elemental* fared better, but two years later the Latin-flavoured *Raoul And The Kings Of Spain* missed the UK Top 40 and, by 1996, during a South American tour, he found himself thinking, he's since confessed, "I've had enough of this!" He therefore focussed on raising kids, co-producing Icelandic artist Emiliana Torrini's 1999 album, *Love In The Time Of Science*, as well as working on what became 2001's underrated *Tomcats Screaming Outside*. Released in the US on 9/11, it was always doomed.

For Orzabal, the separation, he told *The Oklahoman* in 2004, was painful. "We didn't talk for nine years. But we had all these business things we couldn't sort of dissolve... So, there was always some kind of relations. Also, we had a lot of friends in common." And it was business, not to mention maturity, that reconciled them at the turn of the century, when Orzabal helped out with legal issues connected with one of Smith's properties. "I think at some point," said Orzabal, "we both sort of realised that it was, as Curt said, the longest sulk in history."

"We weren't sure about getting back together again," he added to Super Deluxe Edition in 2022, but he credits this "happy period" to their producer, a regular collaborator, Charlton Pettus. "We found that between the three of us there was an incredible balance. Charlton could modulate us; he could interpret us." In addition, the fortuitous use in 2001's *Donnie Darko* of a cover by Gary Jules of the band's *Mad World* led it to No.1 in 2003, only encouraging the duo to believe a revival might be on the cards.

The optimistic title given to the resulting album – *Everybody Loves A Happy Ending* – was inevitable. An overdue companion to *The Seeds Of Love* – or, as Smith later called it, "a finale" – it was, Orzabal has said, "easy to make", evident in its celebratory character.

Full of Beatles-esque magic, with further flourishes of Pink Floyd's dreaminess on the title track, Crowded House's charms in the quietly sentimental *Call Me Mellow*, and ELO and XTC's dexterity evident in *Who Killed Tangerine?*, it also boasts *Who You Are*'s sweet harmonies and *The Devil*'s breathless, proggish drama. There is, to boot, *Closest Thing To Heaven*'s irresistible jubilation, an anthemic *Secret World* worthy of Robbie Williams, and valedictory soul in the closing *Last Days On Earth*.

> IT WAS ARGUABLY THE RIGHT RECORD, JUST AT THE WRONG TIME. PERHAPS THAT TIME HAS FINALLY COME.

Unfortunately, that title didn't turn out to be the prediction they'd wryly intended. It hadn't helped that Arista, the label for whom they'd recorded the album, had dropped them, so its already delayed release didn't arrive on American label New Door until September 2004, while the UK waited another six months before it at last materialised on Gut Records, when it charted even lower than *Raoul And The Kings Of Spain*. Still, it was arguably the right record, just at the wrong time, and perhaps that time has finally come. Though it failed to prove a tipping point back then, time – as Smith and Orzabal have proven – heals all wounds. Twenty years on, then, it fully deserves a second chance, and hopefully its overdue happy ending. Everybody loves one, after all.

TOP 20 80s 12" SINGLES

NEW ORDER, NENEH CHERRY, NU SHOOZ... JUST THREE OF 20 ACTS HERE WHO TOOK THE 12" SINGLE AND MOULDED IT IN THEIR OWN IMAGE, HELPING IT TO BECOME A DOMINANT FORMAT OF THE 1980s

JEREMY ALLEN

The 12" record was introduced to vinyl consumers by Columbia way back in 1948, replacing the old phonograph cylinders, though it was during disco's heyday that 45rpm mixes featuring a high fidelity single track across one side of a record became fashionable. By the 1980s, the 12" was *de rigueur* for any self-respecting artist or label. The proliferation of the extended mix would no doubt have surprised Tom "undisputed king of the disco mix" Moulton, or even hip-hop great DJ Kool Herc, innovators whose methods of prolonging the groove came from the necessity of keeping the dancefloor moving.

20

DEAD OR ALIVE

YOU SPIN ME ROUND (LIKE A RECORD) (1984)

In 1984, *You Spin Me Round* not only ushered in one of pop's great characters in Pete Burns, but it also signalled the first supernova success for soon-to-be legendary pop producers Stock Aitken Waterman. SAW's first No.1 also reached No.11 on the US Billboard Hot 100, and the 12"s Murder Mix lives up to its name, executed by a deadly – and uncredited – Phil Harding of PWL Studios. Harding whips up tension with bass oscillations and percussion, Burns arriving fashionably late, two minutes in.

19

THE CURE

WHY CAN'T I BE YOU? (1987)

If the oft misheard Cure lyric "you make me horny again" is a mondegreen, this track's producers François Kevorkian and Ron St. Germain weren't set right. Horns, be they synthetic or otherwise, are unleashed all over the *Why Can't I Be You?* 12" remix. An uncharacteristically ebullient track, souped up with congas and dub-like guitar, there's even a suggestion that Robert Smith had subconsciously absorbed the melody to Wham!'s *Bad Boys* into the chorus and brassy arrangements.

18

ARCADIA

ELECTION DAY (1985)

When Duran Duran went on hiatus during the mid-80s, Nick Rhodes and Simon Le Bon moved into the Plaza Athénée, a five star Parisian hotel that'll set guests back a few grand a night. That was just the beginning of the eye-watering expense that went into the making of *So Red The Rose* by Duranie side-project Arcadia, creators of what Le Bon described as "the most pretentious album ever made". *Election Day* was the highlight here, and the ostentatious Consensus Mix sounds every bit as opulent as those circumstances dictated.

17

BRONSKI BEAT

WHY? (1984)

The extended version of *Why?* appears to play it straight several minutes into a near identical mix. Then comes a breakdown redolent of Depeche Mode's *Construction Time Again*, or even their more irate influencers, Einstürzende Neubauten. A broken glass is tossed into the mix like a grenade, to disrupt the flow. Jimmy Somerville, meanwhile, addresses the protagonist, casually singing about kissing "*his* lips" – a giant landmark moment in a Top 10 hit – with dancefloors responding to this defiant act of normalisation.

16

M/A/R/R/S

PUMP UP THE VOLUME (1987)

The origin story of M/A/R/R/S was one that ostensibly ended in failure, with the two bands brought together by 4AD's Ivo Watts-Russell (A.R. Kane and Colourbox) not hitting it off in the studio. Nevertheless, the A-side *Pump Up The Volume*, heavily influenced by Coldcut's *Say Kids What Time Is It?* and featuring an Eric B & Rakim sample (among many) that gives the track its title, crossed over from the clubs and became an unlikely No.1, inspiring a slew of similarly Dadaist house tracks.

15

DEPECHE MODE

JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH (1981)

Produced by Mute's Daniel Miller with the assistance of the band, the Schizo Mix of Depeche's *Just Can't Get Enough* is in many ways a precursor to what was to come, though only in parts. First, we're met with the bright and breezy Vince Clarke-led early incarnation, and then – in keeping with the slightly problematically named mix – we switch abruptly, plunging into something altogether more crepuscular in the adjoining bridges. Post-Clarke, the foursome would become renowned for exploring their darker sides.

14

PETER GABRIEL

BIG TIME (1987)

Sledgehammer might have been the colossal hit, though four singles into the campaign for Peter Gabriel's classic album *So*, he put out his most bombastic ever 7" and 12", a sly satire on the yuppie boom that was being driven by unfettered capitalism. *Big Time* benefits from big, big production, with Latin percussion courtesy of Grammy-winning mixer Tom Lord-Alge, as well as Gabriel and King Crimson mainstay Tony Levin's slap bass shifted up in the mix. It should have been a shoo-in for the *American Psycho* soundtrack.

13

NU SHOOZ

I CAN'T WAIT (1985)

I Can't Wait by the Portland, Oregon, husband-and-wife duo Nu Shooz was only kept off the No.1 spot by Wham!'s *Edge Of Heaven*. One-hit wonders Valerie Day and John Smith conquered Canada with the doggy-sampling classic, although interestingly, it was the song's Dutch mix which became the de facto version. An American Mix was closer to Nu Shooz' R&B roots but didn't emanate the same charm as Netherlands' house pioneer Peter Slaghuis' more electro treatment, giving the track its sparkly, commercial sheen.

12

THE PSYCHEDELIC FURS HEARTBEAT (1984)

British New Wave art rockers The Psychedelic Furs embraced 12" remixes far more than other bands of their ilk in the 80s, with 1984's Mendelsohn Mix of *Heartbeat* serving as a fine example. Originally produced by Keith Forsey – who went from drumming at Moroder's Musicland to producing stars such as Billy Idol – engineer Julian Mendelsohn stepped in to ramp up the tension with a four-to-the-floor beat, chopping up Mars Williams' sax and stripping things away to make Richard Butler's acidic vocals sound all the more gravelly.

11

NENEH CHERRY BUFFALO STANCE (1989)

In 1988, *Buffalo Stance* stood at the gateway of the ensuing decade while doffing a cap to its antecedents, sampling the UK's first hip-hop single in Malcolm McLaren's *Buffalo Gals* (hence the name), and bringing added sass and even a taster of the Bristol Sound that was to come. UK hip-hop might have taken its time in becoming internationally accepted, though hip American remixers lined up to treat this, with Arthur Baker's Half Way To House remix sitting alongside Kevin Saunderson's Techno Stance Remix.

10

BLONDIE CALL ME (1981)

Eyebrows were raised when Elvis Costello's *This Year's Model* was released in Spanish in 2021, but Blondie were decades ahead of their New Wave contemporary. The Giorgio Moroder-produced 12" of *Call Me* (or *Llámame* in the translation by Buddy and Mary McCluskey) was the lead song from the movie *American Gigolo*. The Spanish version had been intended for the Mexican and South American market via the Salsoul disco label, though so convincing was Debbie Harry's performance that it was also released in the US and UK.

09

SISTERS OF MERCY TEMPLE OF LOVE (1983)

The sound of Doktor Avalanche – the Sisters Of Mercy's trusty drum machine – lent itself to the metronomic precision of the dancefloor, especially on their 12" releases. *Temple Of Love* became an integral floorfiller at The Batcave, Planet X, Eric's Club, Le Phonographique, or any other goth-adjacent subterranean sweatbox across the country in 1983. Sisters Of Mercy arguably improved on *Temple Of Love* when they sampled Ofra Haza for a 1992 remix, even if they had to part with most of the royalties to the Israeli singer.

08

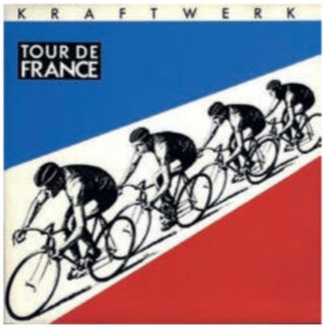
SOFT CELL TAINTED LOVE / WHERE DID OUR LOVE GO (1981)

Soft Cell's electronic rendition of Gloria Jones' northern soul classic *Tainted Love* is up there with the greatest cover versions of all time, and so – on a roll – it made sense for them to tackle The Supremes in a beautifully worked medley. *Tainted Love* appears to melt halfway through as the pistons pump with less regularity and Marc Almond delivers *Where Did Our Love Go* in an elegant sotto voce. "If only we'd put our own song on it then we would be considerably richer," he told *The Guardian* years later.

07

DAVID BOWIE LET'S DANCE (1983)

During the 70s, Bowie had been the most forward-thinking pop star on the planet. Come the 80s, he'd turned to hot producers and collaborators for inspiration, and there was nobody hotter than Nile Rodgers in 1983. *Let's Dance* was the mega-hit that Bowie craved, a funk-laden masterclass in pop transcendence. The 12" isn't discernibly different to the 7", though there's trumpets and sax squiggles throughout. You suspect Bowie – whose first love was jazz – would have relished smuggling atonal trills onto an international smash.



06

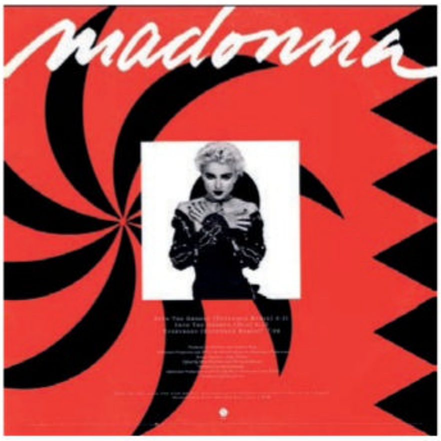
KRAFTWERK TOUR DE FRANCE (1983)

The most important electronic band of them all had a relatively patchy 80s compared to their imperial phase, with the peddling, pulsing, panting *Tour de France* representing a show of muscular strength in amongst swathes of seeming inactivity. Kraftwerk's Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider became obsessed with cycling, an antithetical pastime in the landscape of rock'n'roll, though the German musicians always were contrary. As fans of the race, and Francophiles who spoke the language, the preferred remix is the French version, *naturellement*.

05

DONNA SUMMER I FEEL LOVE (1982)

The original *I Feel Love* was released in 1977, an epochal 7" single that Brian Eno famously waved at David Bowie, hailing it as the future. Five years later, disco legend Patrick Cowley remixed an epic version that's one part genius, one part bonkers, not that they're mutually exclusive. Giorgio Moroder's locomotive bars are stretched out across 15 minutes, with drops and risers, years before the terminology existed, and a scything synth solo infusing the track that's oddly redolent of one of Ian Anderson's wilder flute peregrinations.



04

MADONNA
INTO THE GROOVE (1987)

Madonna's first UK No.1 heralded a change of direction in 1985, featuring a propulsive bass groove played on a Roland synthesizer that took full advantage of the possibilities of MIDI. So cool was the track that fellow New Yorkers Sonic Youth renamed themselves Ciccone Youth to cover it in 1988. And still, even that extraordinary accolade pales in comparison to the smoking hot, forensic Shep Pettibone mix of *Into The Groove* that left scorch marks on the dancefloor in 1987. Pettibone remixed Madonna many times, though this was undoubtedly the zenith.

03

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
TWO TRIBES (1984)

The nuclear alert siren signalling four minutes to the apocalypse was high on any child's biggest fears list growing up in the 1980s. With the *Two Tribes* Annihilation mix, Frankie Goes To Hollywood – aided by the guiding hand of producer Trevor Horn – not only reproduced the dreaded sound at the outset, but also cut up a public information film from the 70s with such salutary advice as: "If any member of the family should die whilst in the shelter, put them outside, but remember to tag them first." It slapped hard, nevertheless.

02

GRACE JONES
SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM (1985)

Slave To The Rhythm was supposedly meant for Frankie Goes To Hollywood, though anyone else singing it other than Grace Jones seems preposterous now. Styled by boyfriend Jean-Paul Goude and shaped by ZTT, Jones became a commodity and an avatar all rolled into one – though also a very meta/self-aware one. Trevor Horn spent an inordinate amount of cash even by the 80s' profligate standards crafting ever more outlandish versions, though the (Hot) Blooded mix is exquisitely crafted and an exemplar of Horn's creativity during his mid-80s peak.

01

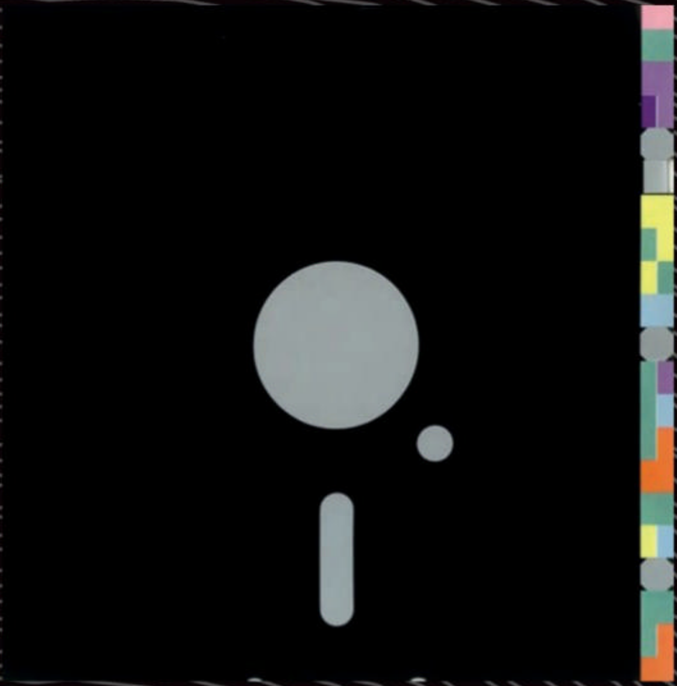
NEW ORDER
BLUE MONDAY (1983)

Blue Monday's placing at No.1 here will come as a surprise to precisely nobody. The best-selling 12" single of all time is inarguably the most influential, too. It served as the perfect transition for beleaguered former members of Joy Division, who would go on to inhabit a unique space in the British musical landscape where dark guitar-led atmospheres coalesced with stark machine rhythms.

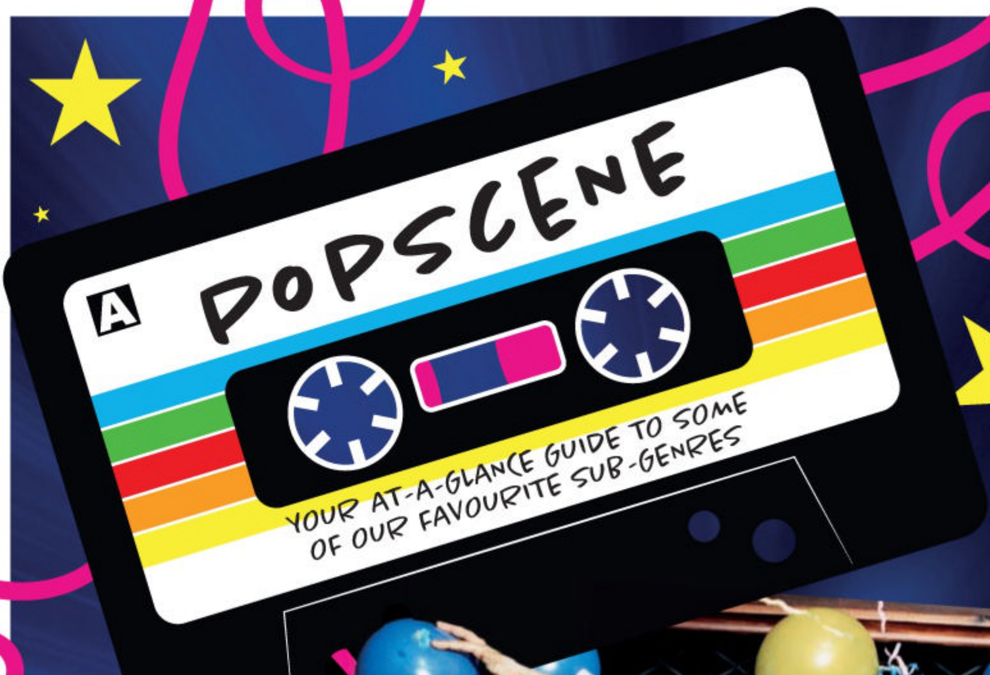
New Order, with the addition of Gillian Gilbert on keyboards, programmed the song into homemade sequencers, with human error leading to innovative breakdowns. The track was heavily influenced by recent forebears, of course: take a sample from Kraftwerk's *Uranium* here, an Ennio Morricone spaghetti western bassline there, with a nod to Eurodisco's Giorgio Moroder and New York disco's Sylvester; though perhaps what made it unique was the industrial Mancunian bleakness they instinctively imbued.

Blue Monday's place in history is assured, though it has never gone away either, appearing in some form or other in songs by Rihanna, Kylie Minogue and Pet Shop Boys, with its continued relevance in stark contrast to Peter Saville's record sleeve, punched to resemble a 5" floppy disc.

Formats may fall into obsolescence but 1983's *Blue Monday* will endure for as long as people intend to keep dancing.



BLUE MONDAY'S PLACE IN HISTORY IS ASSURED, THOUGH IT HAS NEVER GONE AWAY EITHER, WITH ITS CONTINUED RELEVANCE IN STARK CONTRAST TO PETER SAVILLE'S SLEEVE



EUROPOP

THE FEELGOOD GENRE THAT DOESN'T TAKE ITSELF TOO SERIOUSLY

STEVE O'BRIEN

Scandinavian Europop faves Aqua get the party started

WHAT IS IT?

Isn't it just typical of the UK to refer to Europop as something only from other countries, even when we're part of Europe geographically and were members of its political bloc for nearly 50 years. But no, the sound, it was decided, was entirely separate, even when Brit-born artists got caught up in its sparkle.

Allmusic describes the Europop genre as, "a style of pop music that was deliberately lightweight, silly, and slickly produced". The term can be used, then, in a pejorative way to describe something that's utterly trivial, or that's talked about approvingly as, well, something fluffy and fun.

That's not to say that absolutely all Europop is inherently "lightweight and silly". ABBA, who are often seen as Europop, may be slickly produced but you'd hardly call lyrics referencing the Battle of Waterloo witless. But though ABBA are indeed pop and, yes, from Europe, that's not the sound most of us have in our heads when we think Europop. For that, we have to head to a band like Aqua. The Danish-Norwegian quartet's *Barbie Girl* is the quintessential Europop track, with its bouncy dance beats and joyously frivolous lyrics.

Unlike most genres we feature here, Europop doesn't have a sound that's rooted in cement. It can be slickly produced, until it's not (Right Said Fred), summery and silly, until it's not (*All That She Wants*) and squarely aimed at the dancefloor – until it's not (*Fernando*).

So, it's best to look at those songs that absolutely are, without a shadow of a doubt, Europop, in the way most of us think of it. Forget the outliers, cast aside the artists with weight and respect – here we give you the cream of the Europop crop, in all their frothy, insubstantial, camp glory.

WHAT THEY SAY

"It took itself less seriously than Eurodisco and, as vacation music, could bring a smile to even the most jaded rock fan, as did Aqua's *Barbie Girl*, which became Europop's greatest global success to date when it was released in the late 1990s."

ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA

"The 90s dance-pop revival spearheaded by groups like Take That, the Spice Girls, and Backstreet Boys owed a great deal to the sound and style of Europop, while English-speaking artists who imitated the style for its incessant catchiness often added elements of irony and/or trashy camp."

ALLMUSIC

ESSENTIAL NAMES

ARMY OF LOVERS
Formed in Sweden in 1987 by Alexander Bard, Jean-Pierre Barda and Camilla Henemark, Army Of Lovers were one of the most visually distinctive bands of their era, with their campily outlandish costumes mostly designed by fashionista Camilla Thulin. Masterminded by sex worker-turned-economics graduate Bard, the band was formed from the ashes of bubblegum outfit Barbie, hitting the UK chart (if at the lower end) with such songs such as *Obsession* and *Ride The Bullet*. They split in '96, reformed in 2001, disbanded again in 2009 before reuniting in 2012, releasing their latest album, *Sexodus*, in 2023.

ACE OF BASE
Dismissed at the time as the poor man's ABBA, mainly because they were a two-woman, two-man pop outfit from Sweden, as if no one else was allowed to form a band there, Ace Of Base enjoyed a solid tally of five Top 10 hits in the UK during the 1990s, including a No.1 with the frankly brilliant *All That She Wants*. Consisting of siblings Jonas, Linn and Jenny Berggren with Ulf Ekberg, they are – and this is no small feat – the third most successful Swedish group of all time, behind ABBA and Roxette. In fact, they are so titanic in their native Sweden that just this year, a three-part documentary about the group's rise and fall was released, titled *All That She Wants: The Unbelievable Story Of Ace Of Base*.

MODERN TALKING
When you're debating Germany's most popular pop duo (and when are we *not* discussing that?), it's hard not to bring up Modern Talking. From 1983 to 1987, they were responsible for a series of silken pop tracks that lit up the charts around Europe, even if Britain remained unseduced. Debut single *You're My Heart, You're My Soul* went Top 10 right across Europe, including in their homeland (though it would go no further than No.56 in the UK). The blissfully infectious *Brother Louie* would be their biggest British hit, peaking at No.4 in 1986. ■

ESSENTIAL SINGLES

AQUA
BARBIE GIRL (1997)

Despite Aqua fans hoping that the band's signature song would feature in last year's box office-busting *Barbie* movie, *Barbie Girl* wasn't actually used, at least not in its original form, with Mattel choosing to soundtrack a new song, *Barbie World*, that only sampled Aqua's original. Still, the '97 version, with its compulsively catchy chorus, has still had something of a resurgence in the past 12 months, thanks to the success of the Margot Robbie-starring blockbuster.

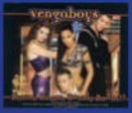
WHIGFIELD
SATURDAY NIGHT (1994)

Sannie Charlotte Carlson's debut 45 entered the UK Singles Chart at No.1 in 1994, dethroning Wet Wet Wet's 15-week chart-topper *Love Is All Around*. Also reaching the summit in Ireland, Germany, Spain and Switzerland, and going Top 10 in Austria, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, it's fair to say that *Saturday Night* was a bona fide Euro hit. Even today, we're guessing, there are countless fifty-somethings who are prone to spin this as they're getting ready for a night on the tiles.

ACE OF BASE
HAPPY NATION (1993)

Ace Of Base's title track from their debut album wasn't their first hit (that honour goes to the UK No.3-charting *All That She Wants*), but the band's third 45 is one of their best, hinting at a depth that few critics at the time ever acknowledged, though *People* magazine did admit that the song "proves Ace Of Base to be more substantive than a mere ABBA clone."

VENGABOYS BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!! (1999)



Vengaboys' cover version of the haunting Leonard Cohen original… oh, we're joshing of course. With lyrics like "Boom, boom, boom, boom/ I want you in my room/ Let's spend the night together/ From now until forever", nobody here was going to win a Euro equivalent of an Ivor Novello Award. In fact, the wittiest thing this Dutch Europop group ever did was title their debut album *Greatest Hits! Part 1*. Other than that, it's cheerily moronic stuff, and hit No.1 in the UK in June 1999.

ARMY OF LOVERS
CRUCIFIED (1991)

Army Of Lovers' first single from their second album was their first to chart in the UK, even though it only made No.47. It deserved better, as did frankly all of their 45s, which took Europop to new, dizzyingly camp heights. The song was, however, a huge club hit in 1991, while its video, by Swedish directors Fredrik Boklund and Martin Persson, was a favourite of MTV and also BSB's short-lived music channel The Power Station.

POPARAZZI

READERS SHARE THEIR FAVOURITE PHOTOS AS THEY GET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN PLANET POP

Send your Poparazzi pics now to **steve.harnell@anthem.co.uk**

NORMAN COOK
WITH CLIVE HAMMOND

"Back in November 2013, I attended a Shaun By The Sea charity event at Brighton Corn Exchange. It was an auction of 45 Shaun The Sheep sculptures dotted around the city in aid of the local Martlets Hospice. Norman is an ambassador for the hospice and was guest DJ. I was thrilled to chat to him and grab a photo. What a lovely man – he stayed for the entire four-hour auction, interacted with the bidders and even bid on items himself."

NIK KERSHAW
WITH PAUL DOUBLE

"This photo of me and Nik Kershaw was taken at The Apex, Bury St Edmunds, in September 2017 following one of his sold-out shows. After the gig, Nik came into the foyer to sign photos and chat with those who'd waited behind. I even took my parents along – it made a change from them seeing Daniel O'Donnell! I've been a massive fan of Nik from the very beginning and grew up a few roads away from where he was brought up in Ipswich. I have an extensive collection of Nik memorabilia – probably the largest anywhere in the world. I've just seen him with Chesney Hawkes at the O2 Forum in Kentish Town, then I'm catching Nik again in Norwich in June and at the O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire in October."

LOUISE
WITH NEIL DANGERFIELD

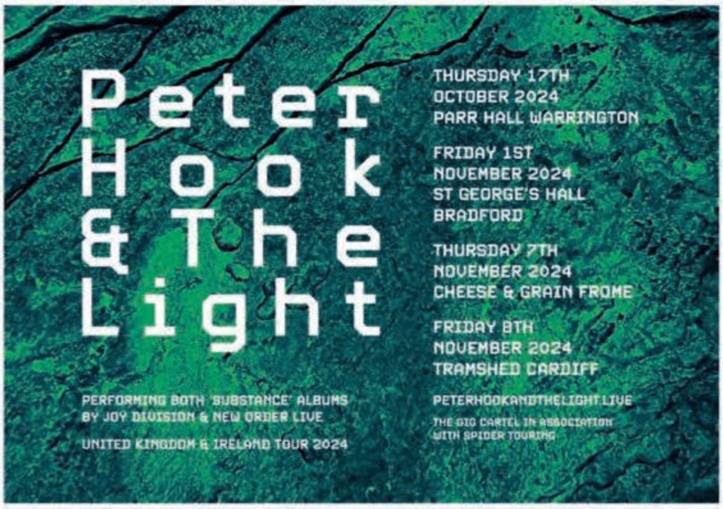
"I caught up with the lovely Louise at HMV Westfield in London on 4 June last year when she signed copies of her Greatest Hits. Louise was so nice and had so much time for each fan. We discussed her book, album and intimate show, which I had attended three days earlier at the O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire. What an amazing gig that was."

JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD
WITH LORNA CORT

"This photo was taken in 2018 outside The Social in Soho, where James had just played a solo acoustic set. He was happy to hang around and chat with fans and is always an engaging, self-deprecating and humble man with a very firm handshake. I've been lucky enough to follow the Manic Street Preachers since I was a teenager in 1991. I've seen them perform 150 times and even played guitar with James and other fans in the *Little Baby Nothing* video in 1992. The Manics have been a huge part of my life and such a positive influence over the years. I'm hoping to see them over the summer on tour with Suede for gig number 151!"

GIG CARTEL IN ASSOCIATION WITH FRUIT PIE MUSIC PRESENT
NIK AND BAND KERSHAW
2024
28 JUN - OXFORD - 02 ACADEMY
29 JUN - NORWICH - EPIC STUDIOS
12 JUL - NORTHAMPTON - ROADMENDER
WITH SUPPORT FROM SEB WESSON

THE UNDERTONES
OCTOBER 2024 and friends
Thursday 10 Liverpool Hangar 34*
Friday 11 Sunderland Fire Station*
Saturday 12 Sheffield Leadmill*
*RUTS DC
Thursday 17 Lincoln Engine Shed+
Friday 18 Norwich Epic+
Saturday 19 Wolverhampton Kk's+
+THE REZILLOS
Thursday 24 Frome Cheese & Grain #
Friday 25 London Camden Electric Ballroom #
Saturday 26 Southampton 1865#
#PETE WYLIE & THE MIGHTY WAH!



Peter Hook & The Light
THURSDAY 17TH OCTOBER 2024 PARR HALL WARRINGTON
FRIDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 2024 ST GEORGE'S HALL BRADFORD
THURSDAY 7TH NOVEMBER 2024 CHEESE & GRAIN FROME
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PETERHOOKANDTHELIGHT.LIVE
THE GIG CARTEL IN ASSOCIATION WITH SPIDER TOURING

HUGH CORNWELL
ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR TOUR
NOVEMBER 2024
20 READING SUB 89
21 LEEDS OLD WOOLLEN
22 EDINBURGH QUEENS HALL
23 SUNDERLAND FIRE STATION
27 SOUTHAMPTON THE BROOK
28 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
29 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
30 NORTHAMPTON ROADMENDER
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CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF HUMAN RACING & THE RIDDLE
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05 OCT EDINBURGH QUEENS HALL
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08 OCT CAMBRIDGE JUNCTION
09 OCT MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2
10 OCT NEW BRIGHTON FLORAL PAVILION
11 OCT WOLVERHAMPTON WULFRUN
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Available to pre-order: The MCA Years 10CD / DVD box set released July on Cherry Red Records

Jewel in the crown

WITH AN EXPANDED REISSUE ABOUT TO BE RELEASED TO CELEBRATE ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, WE MEET MARCELLA DETROIT TO HEAR THE INSIDE STORY OF HER BOLDLY AMBITIOUS CHRIS THOMAS-PRODUCED 1994 SOLO LP, *JEWEL*. "I ENVISIONED THE ALBUM WAS TO BE QUIRKY – VERY, VERY QUIRKY," SHE TELLS US...

ANNIE ZALESKI

Jewel **features a heady cast of famous collaborators from Phil Manzanera and Jools Holland to Sir Elton John**

Marcella Detroit in 1994, the year she scored her first solo UK Top 20 hit *with Jewel*'s lead single *I Believe*

Long before Marcella Detroit rose to prominence alongside Siobhan Fahey as one half of Shakespears Sister, the powerhouse singer had already established a career as a songwriter and vocal collaborator. Under the name Marcy Levy, she sang backup for classic rockers Bob Seger and Eric Clapton – as well as co-writing the latter's 1977 hit *Lay Down Sally* – and duetted with Robin Gibb on *Help Me!*, which appeared in the cult 1980 New Wave movie *Times Square*. And in 1982, she released a solo LP, *Marcella*, that received warm reviews but didn't make much of a commercial dent, but went on to co-write songs for Chaka Khan (*So Close*) and Belinda Carlisle (UK Top 40 hit *Little Black Book*).

When Detroit released her second solo album, 1994's *Jewel*, she had momentum on her side: Shakespears Sister's 1992 second LP *Hormonally Yours* produced the yearning single *Stay*, which spent eight weeks at the top of the charts in the UK and reached the Top 5 in the United States.

Jewel, which is being reissued in various formats for the album's 30th anniversary, was no less pop-oriented; for example, the anthemic lead single *I Believe* boasts a pleasing power ballad sweep. However, the album was eclectic, with highlights including the funky, electro-kissed *Perfect World*, searing pop-rocker *I'm No Angel* and the upbeat, R&B-influenced *You Don't Tell Me Everything*.

The expanded 2CD set of *Jewel* includes a disc of B-sides, unreleased demos and remixes, from acts such as The Beloved, Way Out West, Youth, and Masters At Work's Kenny 'Dope' Gonzalez. Of particular note is the fiery 90s house music banger *Second Class Citizen* – a newly remixed version of a tune Detroit wrote during this era – and several gorgeous acoustic songs from *Jewel*, including *Out Of My Mind*, a track written specifically for her by her husband, musician Lance Aston. "It's such an honour to have a song written about you, and for it to be so heartfelt and beautiful was just really humbling," Marcella says. "I was really grateful – and it's all part of the whole era, the whole time."

Jewel emerged after a time of musical transition and upheaval. Detroit had learned that Fahey wanted to take a break and focus on family after promotion wrapped for *Hormonally Yours*. In response, Detroit started stockpiling musical ideas for solo material while the duo was still busy on the road. "I love to work with concepts, with titles," she says. "I was jotting down a bunch of ideas and then would start developing them whenever I had any time off." Detroit eventually headed back to L.A. and started fleshing out demos in her own studio, energised by having the time and space to focus on being creative.

When it came time to record these songs, she considered working with future Björk collaborator Marius de Vries. "How I envisioned the album was to be quirky – very, very quirky," she says. "Still using my influences, which are based in American music, but I wanted it to be quirkier." Unfortunately, the timing and location didn't work out; Detroit would've had to have been away from her family and young child for an extended period had she and de Vries collaborated.

Detroit ended up instead recording at the legendary Olympic Studios made famous by The Rolling Stones. "It was isolated, just outside of London, across the Hammersmith Bridge, so there was a sense of privacy and such a great vibe of creativity there," the singer recalls. "You felt like you were in your own little bubble, which is perfect for the creative, to be locked slightly away from the madness but close enough to be able to access it."

And she also ended up being happy with *Jewel*'s eventual producer: Chris Thomas, the legend who had also worked with bands such as the Sex Pistols, Roxy Music and The Pretenders. As it happens, Thomas had also produced *Stay* – and flipped when he heard Shakespears Sister's demo of the song. "He jumped up and said, 'No.1 smash!'" Detroit recalls. "And Siobhan and I were like, 'Huh?' This is a concept song about, you know, we're these cat women on the moon and I'm begging an earthling to stay with me. It was not really intended to be a single, but that's what he heard."

Thomas brought this same discerning ear and instincts to *Jewel*, helping to recruit a live band of musicians to augment the foundation that Detroit created with her demos. "It sounds modern, but there's also a little bit of spontaneity as well," she says. "It's not all machines aside from my programmed stuff."

Collaborators included acclaimed Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera, as well as guest appearances from Jools Holland and Sir Elton John; the latter teamed up with Detroit on a duet of the Ashford & Simpson-penned *Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing* [see sidebar]. "Everybody that we were working with were really in tune, very sensitive to what was going on," she says. "It was a brilliant environment. Chris was really funny and great to work with. But he also was very serious when we were recording it, very serious about what he was doing."

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Shakespears Sister's hiatus naturally informed some of the songs on *Jewel*, although Detroit stresses firmly that the record is *not* completely about the schism. "Taylor Swift isn't the first one to ever invent writing songs about personal experiences," she says lightly. "The artist takes what has happened to them and talks about the human condition. That's what we do, and hopefully other people relate to it. It makes people feel like they're not alone. And it makes you, as the artist, feel like you're not alone."

The gothy, string-swizzled *Art Of Melancholy*, for example, started out first as a song title – based off her misremembering the name of a book gifted to her by record producer Denny Cordell – and then developed into a poem that found her interrogating her

Photographer Glen Luchford shot Marcella for the sleeve art to *I Believe*

Marcella and the Rocketman

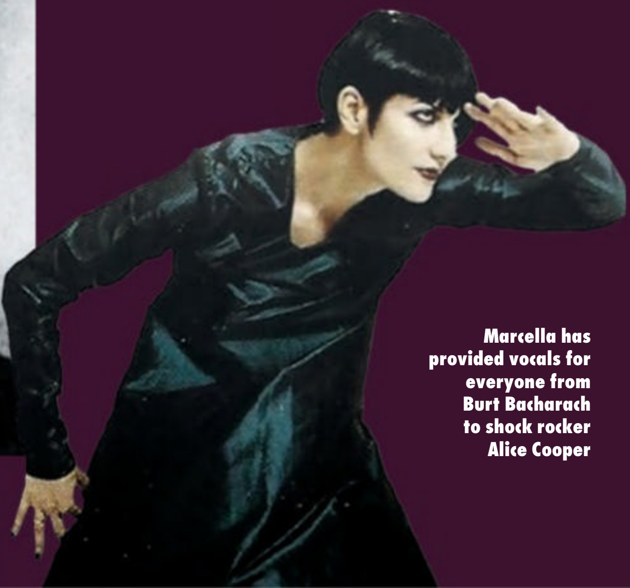
While Detroit was recording *Jewel*, Elton John rang up Chris Thomas with a request: would he produce John's forthcoming duets album? Thomas declined the offer, noting that he was currently working with Detroit, but Elton wasn't miffed; in fact, he responded by asking Marcella to be on the album *and* choose her preferred duet song. It's safe to say that she was thrilled.

"I was always such an Elton John fan," she says. "I remember in my teens going to parties where I would hear his album playing in the background and we'd be doing all kinds of substances and singing along to *Bennie And The Jets*."

Detroit suggested John's 1970 cut *Border Song*, but Elton passed, so she started cycling through Motown classics, eventually landing on 1968's Marvin Gaye/ Tammi Terrell duet *Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing*.

"I thought it would be cool to have a groove like *Sexual Healing* to pay homage to Marvin Gaye, but make it modern and fresh sounding," she says. "And so that's what we did." For the cherry on top, she had the chance to sing the tune with Elton together in the studio. "That was just incredible," she said. "He's a guy that could do no wrong. Every note, every sound that came out of his mouth was really perfection."

Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing ended up appearing on both *Jewel* and John's 1993 effort *Duets* and peaked at No.24 in the UK, leading to the pair appearing on *Top Of The Pops*, among other things. "It was a real thrill," she says.



Marcella has provided vocals for everyone from Burt Bacharach to shock rocker Alice Cooper

dark moods. "I was trying to figure out, why am I so miserable? I've got so many great things going on in my life. What is my default? Why does it go back to this?" Meanwhile, the torchy, blues-influenced *James Brown* compared the soul great's legendary performances to feeling worn out by a decaying friendship.

"Whenever James Brown would perform, he would give a million percent then he would have to get some people to come and help him off the stage and put a cape on him," she explains. "He was completely spent. So that's kind of how I felt in a relationship that I was in at the time, a friendship. And I felt like, 'It feels futile. I can't really communicate with this person.'" As if to head off any speculation, she pointedly adds: "And no, it wasn't Siobhan; it was a personal relationship with somebody else."

Despite the occasionally heavy subject matter, *Jewel*'s drummer Chuck Sabo, who had worked with Detroit in Shakespears Sister and brought bassist Phil Spalding into the recording mix, recalls a convivial atmosphere and easy musical camaraderie. "There's always some negativity in projects, whether it's a person in the company, a person in the band," Sabo says. "There's always something. And there wasn't with *Jewel*." If anything, Sabo adds that the album exceeded his already-high expectations. "I expected it to be quality, I expected to hear great songs," he says. "She obviously was freer by herself and had the joy of going with whatever felt right for her."

Still, Detroit was acutely aware that Shakespears Sister fans might expect (or prefer) her to release music that hewed closer to *Hormonally Yours*, especially after that album's success. Given all that, did she feel some extra pressure as she went solo? "Sure, I felt pressure," she says. "But the thing is, I was also really excited. I felt completely alive and inspired. If you start paying attention to pressure and what everybody's going to think, you'll never get anything done.

"You're gonna get caught in a trap of being a perfectionist, and think that nothing's good enough. And think, 'I can never do what I did with that record, or with that band, or what I did previously.'"

Detroit was especially thrilled with the success of *I Believe*, which reached No.11 in the UK, in no small part because she wrote it completely by herself. "It really came from something special, from a place in me that was really authentic, really sincere," she says. "And I'm really proud of it." *I Believe* was also named the anthem of New York's Stonewall Festival, a celebration of LGBTQ rights, which gave Detroit the chance to meet and perform with Cyndi Lauper.

Overall, *Jewel* reached No.15 in the UK charts and produced three Top 40 singles – it was also a major commercial success in Australia. Still, Detroit wishes that the album had performed better commercially overall, particularly in her homeland of the United States. As it turns out, however, she and her label weren't on the same page regarding choosing singles. "I wanted one thing, and they wanted other songs," she says. "So, we had some disagreements."

Jewel was also something of a sonic outlier for 1994, a year that was dominated by grunge and Britpop. Had the album been released later in the 90s, when forward-looking R&B-influenced pop had a moment, its fortunes may have been different.

In fact, Detroit recalls visiting a publisher in New York just before *Jewel* was released and being in the middle of a meeting when somebody in another room started playing punk band The Offspring. "Everybody in the building was going crazy," she says. "They were like 'Oh, hot, what's that?' and making a big thing out of it."

Although Detroit appreciated then-mainstream rock groups like Nirvana ("I thought they were phenomenal") the incident was a stark reminder of how different her music was from popular trends at the time. "My music was nothing like that," she says. "It had more R&B and pop and rock in it. But it definitely wasn't grungy."

> "I felt pressure. But the thing is, I was also really excited. I felt completely alive and inspired. If you start paying attention to pressure and what everybody's going to think, you'll never get anything done."

AN UNLIKELY REUNION

Post-*Jewel,* Detroit released several solo albums (including the harder-edged *Feeler* in 1996), returned to her blues roots fronting the Marcy Levy Band, and finished third in the 2010 TV series *Popstar To Operastar*. Today, Marcella's content to put touring to the side in favour of studio work, as she's booked guest vocal appearances and continues to write songs, with the hopes of placing them in film and TV.

In 2019, she and Fahey reconvened as Shakespears Sister to record new songs and release the EP *Ride Again*. "I was shocked that it even happened," Detroit admits. She had been wanting to meet with Fahey for a while but "didn't really know what to expect," she says. "We had so many people go in between us interpreting things and not allowing us to communicate. Even back in the day, when we were working together, I had separate management because her management were not looking out for me."

However, the pair's initial conversation at a Los Angeles coffee shop was lovely. "I was grateful that we could meet," Detroit says. "And it was really good, because we got to clarify a few things. Like she thought some things happened that didn't, and vice versa."

At a second meeting in London, Detroit's husband urged the pair to try writing music together again – and so Detroit brought her portable studio out to the Joshua Tree desert for a test recording session that yielded the sinewy 2019 single *All The Queen's Horses*, a showcase for the duo's inimitable vocal chemistry.

Other songs soon followed, skewing spaghetti western, grimy blues, and the dark, velvety baroque pop of Scott Walker. The approach was different than Detroit imagined – "Originally, I thought, 'Let's do something that Shakespears Sister would do *now*, that would be as unusual and quirky as we were *then*," she says – but she liked the results. "Siobhan had a vision of what she wanted to do," Detroit says. "I was really surprised to hear she wanted to do Americana. Because that's kind of my wheelhouse, you know – blues and Americana. But I think it worked; it worked really well."

In her career, Detroit has been blessed with many of these surprising curveballs and kismet-filled moments, in addition to opportunities to work with icons such as Aretha Franklin and Bette Midler. It's clear Marcella doesn't take any of these moments for granted. "When you get that opportunity to work with your idols, it's a life-changing experience," she says.

"You start out having these dreams and then you're in the room with these people – it's quite surreal. It's such an honour, a humbling and wonderful experience. It lets you know that, if you put in the time, you put in the work, those dreams can happen. You just have to really apply yourself and know what you want."

● *Jewel* is released via London Records on 21 June and reviewed on page 93

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LONDON RECORDS

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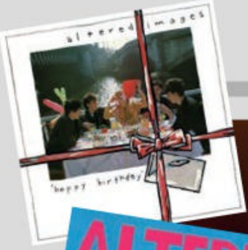
RATINGS

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ VERY GOOD
★★★ GOOD
★★ PATCHY
★ POOR

Charli XCX's avant-pop sixth album *Brat* is reviewed on page 83
© Harley Weir

THE
HOT LIST
NEW RELEASES THAT NEED TO BE ON YOUR CULTURAL RADAR

STEVE HARNELL



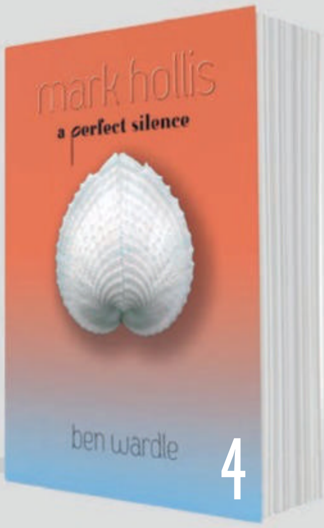
1 DEMON MUSIC GROUP
VARIOUS ARTISTS
Demon has announced a string of *Classic Pop*-friendly reissues and an essential compilation. Heaven 17's *Penthouse And Pavement* and *The Luxury Gap* return separately as 2CD deluxe 7" gatefold remastered sets, featuring the full LPs, non-album A- and B-sides, demos and 12" versions. Given a similar 2CD set treatment will be Altered Images' *Happy Birthday* album and its follow-up *Pinky Blue*. Also of note is a deluxe reissue of Toyah's 1985 album *Minx* boasting rarities and unreleased demos. Finally, the 2CD *It's A Beautiful Thing: The Best Of Ocean Colour Scene* compiles 44 of the finest moments from the Britpop favourites. A 26-song vinyl version is also available plus an exclusive HMV 2LP vinyl set in translucent blue.

2 MICHEL MOERS
AS IS
Michel Moers returns with only his second solo LP in 34 years. Blending thoughtful electronica and surrealism, *As Is* features collaborations with former Propaganda singer Claudia Brücken and Belgian vocalist

Daan Stuyven. Conceived in a diary entry style and influenced by French composer Erik Satie, *As Is* was largely written in transit and both revisits and updates classic songs from Moers' previous work. Moers has recently been involved with remastering the back catalogue of his band Telex, the acclaimed Brussels synth-pop outfit formed in 1978. Moers' only previous solo LP to date was 1990's *Fishing Le Kiss*.

3 PAUL EDMOND
DURAN DURAN EN SCÈNE
Published in a three-edition series and covering 1979-82, the late photographer Paul Edmond was at the heart of the action during Duran Duran's earliest years. A regular at the Rum Runner, Holy City Zoo and Cedar Club venues, a then teenage Edmond had his camera on hand to capture Birmingham's New Romantic scene including the first steps of Simon Le Bon and co. His photos also find the band recording their debut single *Planet Earth* at Chipping Norton Studios. A number of unseen shots feature in the series alongside photos of Boy George, Dexys and UB40.

4 BEN WARDLE
MARK HOLLIS:
A PERFECT SILENCE
This must-read biography of the late Talk Talk frontman is now republished as a paperback in an expanded second edition. Available at markhollisbook.com, the book features four new interviews with colleagues and friends who worked with Hollis, all of whom came forward after the publication of the original hardback in 2021. Of particular interest is a delve into a Hollis-compiled mixtape unearthed by producer Gareth Jones, who worked with Mark on a pre-Talk Talk demo. With tracks from Spirit, Van Morrison, Augustus Pablo and The Rolling Stones, it provides a telling insight into Hollis' influences.



MARC ALMOND
I'M NOT ANYONE

BMG

★★★½☆

AFTER CHANGES IN BOTH THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF MARC ALMOND, HIS LATEST COVERS ALBUM IS A WELCOME OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE TIME OUT FOR REFLECTION

© Nick Spanos

Although it's only been seven years since Marc Almond's previous covers album *Shadows And Reflections*, he has fitted a lot in since 2017, even by his standards. Soft Cell reformed for their 'last ever' concert then quickly un-farewelled to instead make their superb first album for 20 years. There was a joint album with Jools Holland, plus the swirling drama of 2020's *Chaos And A Dancing Star*, an underrated record kneecapped by lockdown.

For anyone with the most casual interest in Almond's life away from music, his decision to quit London after relocating there as soon as he could with Soft Cell's first royalties, is the singer's most dramatic move of all, never mind that he's ended up living in the Portuguese countryside instead.

That tranquillity has given him a rare moment to relax. Which, in his world, means it's time to revisit his record collection and rework some favourites in the studio.

While Almond's covers albums have interpreted everyone from Jacques Brel to traditional Russian folk songs, the loose thread has been melodrama – Almond as torch singer rather than the futurist singer of *Torch*.

That carries on here, Almond stating that these are the songs that make him feel most emotional. Collaborating once again with Mike Stevens who worked on *Shadows And Reflections*, the artists are largely from Almond's own childhood, rather than anything from his contemporaries onwards: Neil Diamond, King Crimson, Blue Cheer, Don McLean and Paul Anka are the most familiar names covered. Broadly speaking, we are in *Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart* territory here.

None of the songs would be out of place on traditional 1980s Radio 2, which is the blessing and curse of these tracks. A singer as controlled as Almond knows exactly how much to give, and he's not going to start being wildly OTT now, even though his vocals are distinctive and poised enough to go there if he wanted. That said, the arrangements are occasionally a little *too* tasteful. When Almond sings: "The world is a bad place, a terrible place to live" in Marmalade's hit *Reflections Of My Life*, it's all as light and airy as if he's covering The Swingle Singers.

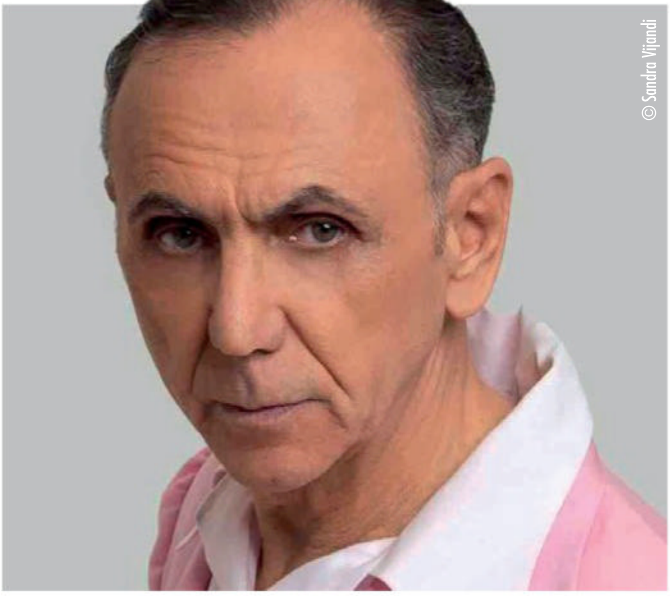
The galloping *Gone With The Wind (Is My Love)* is more like it, the guitar-heavy backing as dramatic as Almond's voice, matched by bringing out a scurrying urgency in *Elusive Butterfly*, as popularised by – crikey – Val Doonican.

With the brilliantly tense title track instantly becoming a signature song summarising Almond's worldview, it's too dismissive to call *I'm Not Anyone* a stopgap. Yet there is the sense of Almond taking stock: something to comfort himself and listeners while he decides what's next. Frequently gorgeous, occasionally cosy: what do you do for an encore? **John Earls**

DEXYS
THE FEMININE DIVINE AND DEXYS CLASSICS LIVE!

100%

★★★★☆


© Sandra Vijandi

Although it reached No.6 in the UK, last year's new Dexys album *The Feminine Divine* seemed to confuse a few of the band's fans, who'd seemingly forgotten that *My Beauty* and *Don't Stand Me Down* were also viewed as head-scratchers on release.

Its accompanying tour, of the album played in full before a second half of 10 old favourites, allowed audiences to become accustomed to the R&B and funk

dominating the new LP's second side, as the band acted out Kevin Rowland's reassessed thoughts on femininity.

An accompanying DVD/Blu-Ray should have been released here, to allow everyone to see the teasing relationship in *Goddess Rules* and mock fights in *I'm Going To Get Free* and *The One That Loves You* give extra context to a revue-style live show: Dexys concerts are always a performance, never simply a gig.

Still, this 3LP/2CD set captures Rowland in full flight, backed by one of the finest of all Dexys line-ups, able to switch from the easy listening harmonies of *Coming Home* to an absolutely nails version of *Plan B*. Only the schmaltzy *My Submission* drags, and, even there, Rowland's falsetto is mightily impressive.

2014's *Nowhere Is Home*, the live album of 2013's tour, captured another fabulous show, but was light on familiar moments. Here, there's a dazzling 1-2-3 of *Come On Eileen*, *Geno* and *Jackie Wilson Said*, all played as if Rowland absolutely needs to live them out anew.

Recorded across the tour, rather than from just one show, the detailed banter sometimes jerks into the next song, rather than flowing naturally. But that's just a tiny quibble, when each track's performance shows Dexys still have so much to offer. Whether it's the cavernous funk keyboards of *My Goddess Is* or the comedy Hammond intro in *Geno* suddenly kicking into a mighty, unstoppable wall of noise, Dexys know where to take you. Here, Kevin Rowland is right at home, and sounding divine. To quote (the admittedly absent) *Celtic Soul Brothers:* More please and thank you. **JE**

HIFI SEAN & DAVID McALMONT
DAYLIGHT

JUL/AUG 2024 CLASSIC POP BEST NEW RELEASE

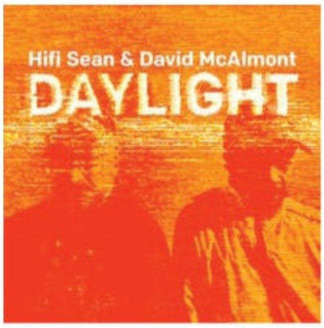
PLASTIQUE

★★★★½

© Rob Martin Alver

Initially getting together on Sean Dickson's first album as Hifi Sean in 2016, the duo's first full joint LP *Happy Ending* last year was a joyous celebration of larking about over house music.

Such a good time was had by all that Dickson and McAlmont have quickly made another two albums – *Twilight* will follow on from *Daylight* in December, while Dickson also found time to front the reformed Soup Dragons for an acclaimed tour last year.



The secret to such a prolific workrate seems to be in keeping up the hi-jinx. The twinkly *USB-USC* is McAlmont reciting the packing list for his holiday, to see if he really *can* make singing a shopping list sound beautiful. As McAlmont excitedly sings "Beach towels!" before a chorus of "USB to USC phone chaaarger" over Dickson's bouncing keys then, hell yes, it's a beautiful song.

As the title implies, from the vintage rave-era squelch of the title track on, *Daylight* is the pair's most euphoric music, but there's serious intent among the generally giddy grooves: *You Are My* and *Golden Hour* are blissful Balearic love songs, while *Meantime* has a bassline feel straight from New Order's *Technique* behind one of McAlmont's most spectacularly euphoric vocals. Which, considering this is, y'know, *David McAlmont*, means the vocal is quite something.

The mood is summarised by McAlmont singing "My instinct for survival is to celebrate" in *Celebrate*. This isn't an explicitly political album by any means, but *Daylight* is also the escapist pop of two gay men who have been through a lot to get here.

That they have arrived here with such a welcoming album offering dance-pop in all its celebratory moods is heroic so soon after *Happy Ending*. Maybe *Twilight* might be mopey dubstep with McAlmont reciting the names of everyone who's annoyed him on a song titled *And You Can Do One Too*. On this form, it'd be a triumph. Someone's phase just got imperial. **JE**

CHARLI XCX
BRAT

ATLANTIC

★★★★☆

Since returning after a five-year gap in 2019, Charli XCX's career has been impossible to pigeonhole, veering from the kind of tune-free irksome art pop beloved of FKA Twigs and Caroline Polachek on 2020's *How I'm Feeling Now* (appropriately stalling outside the UK Top 30) to involving everyone from Ariel Rechtshaid to Digital Farm Animals among the 13 producers on the resulting carer resuscitation of *Crash* that arrived two years later.

The more melodic *Crash* gave the now veteran scenester her first UK No.1 album. Happily, Charli has doubled down on having coherent riffs as her core values. A love letter to the raves that she began performing at as a teenager, *Brat* is indebted to *I Created Disco*-era Calvin Harris – while maintaining the mischief of the original rave era that Charli was too young for. The spirit of S'Express' *Original Soundtrack* is writ large in *Mean Girls* and *Sympathy Is A Knife*.

The ballad *I Might Say Something Stupid* is less effective, Auto-Tuned vocals and discordant synthesizers making it *Say Hello Wave Goodbye* with a head cold. At least the similarly paced *So I*, a tribute to Charli's late producer SOPHIE, is less determinedly gimmicky, featuring the album's strongest lyrics and vocal performance.

Ultimately, the ballads are merely breathing space among the heroically confrontational beats elsewhere. First single *Von Dutch*, complete with its *Black Mirror*-style video, was a taster for the brutally effective dance-pop also offered in the upfront *Talk Talk* and *Everything Is Romantic*, the latter excellent in also managing to incorporate the ballads' cod-symphonic mood in its brief runtime.

© Harley Weir

Alongside the bubblegum pop of *Sucker* a decade earlier, *Brat* is Charli XCX's most complete album. By the time it ends with a minute-long breakdown of every hard beat imaginable thrown together in *365*'s climax, she has established herself as a rave queen. That she's done so with a series of fine choruses makes her smart as well as brattish. **JE**

DANA GILLESPIE
FIRST LOVE

FRETSORE

★★★½☆

Having been involved in more than 70 albums over a career stretching back to the 60s folk scene, Dana Gillespie can reasonably be described as a veteran. Even so, for all that she's highly regarded by her peers and often remembered for her associations with David Bowie, Gillespie has arguably never received the plaudits so often accorded to elder musicians with comparable CVs.

It's to be hoped *First Love* changes this. Adapting a template set by Rick Rubin's work with Johnny Cash on the *American Recordings* series, it finds Gillespie performing a set, bar one song, made up of covers, including leftfield choices.

But, while Rubin went back to basics to capture The Man In Black's tombstone gravitas, *First Love* co-producers Marc Almond and his regular collaborator Tris Penna instead opt for giving Gillespie's bluesy, gutsy, indisputably authentic voice a contemporary, adult-pop sheen.

From the moment the opening bars of her cover of Green Day's *Boulevard Of Broken Dreams* kick in, it's clear this was the right choice. A song that always seemed overwrought as a mid-tempo emo-punk anthem gets a new clarity, simply sounding more grown up. Lana Del Rey's *Gods And Monsters*, a typically studied narrative of hedonism gone sour, is all the more powerful for being sung by someone who lived through the 70s. A duet with Almond on Leonard Cohen's *Dance Me To The End Of Love* is positively jaunty, albeit with mordant undertones.

© Christina Jansen

We'll have to disagree on the wisdom of covering newer Morrissey songs but, if you are able to set aside some of Mozza's more dubious recent utterances, *Spent The Day In Bed* skitters along in fine fashion. By the time that you arrive at a recasting of Fleetwood Mac's *Dreams* as a piano ballad, via songs made famous by, among others, Bob Dylan, Jake Bugg and Python Lee Jackson (the perennial *In A Broken Dream*, sounding here like a lost James Bond theme), a late-career uptick for Gillespie seems highly likely. **Jonathan Wright**

BERNARD BUTLER
GOOD GRIEF

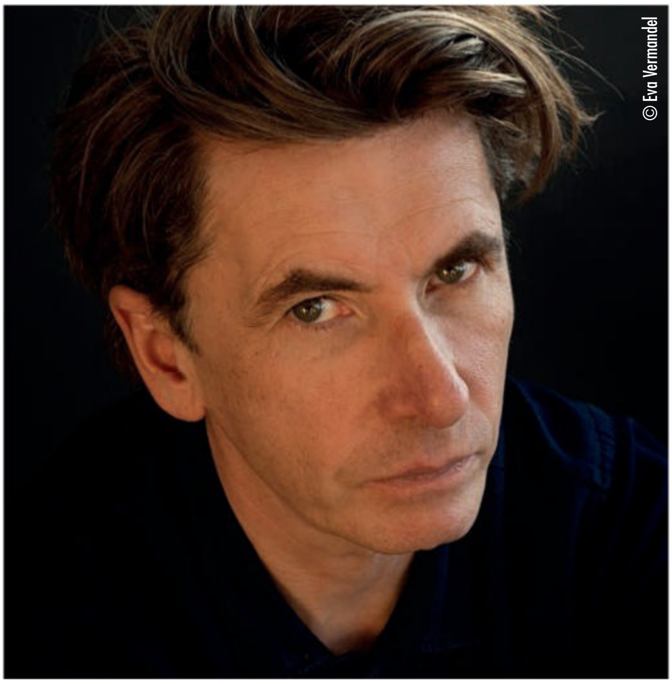
355

★★★☆☆

His first solo album for 25 years, you can't accuse Bernard Butler of being lazy since 1999's *Friends And Lovers.* As well as producing everyone from Tricky to The Libertines via Duffy's mega-selling debut, Butler has also made collaborative albums with actor Jessie Buckley and The Anchoress' Catherine Anne Davies, as well as a fabulous live reunion of McAlmont & Butler.

Yet there's doubtless a parallel world where Butler continued solidly making his own albums, building on the sturdy foundations of those first two solo records. They were reissued in 2021, complete with re-recordings of both LPs. Butler's reimaginings of *People Move On* and *Friends And Lovers* seem to have reminded him of that early promise. Other than vocally, you wouldn't guess it's been 25 years since Butler's expert gift for helping others to shape their music was kept to one side.

First showcased on the fresh re-recordings, Butler's 21st century voice is a surprise: it's none more Big Music, a heroically determined declaration that he's here and has things to say, thanks very much. As with Sam Lee, the folk singer who Butler has produced two acclaimed albums for, Butler's vocal vision won't be for everyone. Still, as he sings in relationship saga *Pretty D*: "I don't give a fuck what you think about me."


© Eva Vermandel

Thankfully, Butler's music is generally as full as his voice, with only *Preaching To The Choir* and *The Wind* drowning under the weight of his proclamations, though the woolly *London Snow*'s bombast feels forced.

That leaves two-thirds of an album which is typically poised, Butler just as good at finding the right setting for his voice as he is for others, whether it's the surging pop of *Deep Emotions* or *The Forty Foot*'s elegant bounce. Come for the exquisite guitar hooks, stay for the overall richness as Butler re-establishes himself as a singer-songwriter genetically unable to compromise. **JE**

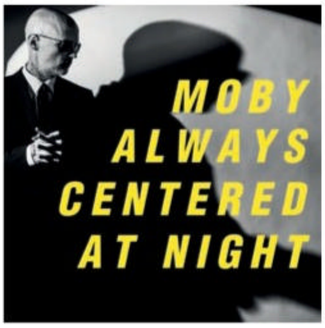
MOBY
ALWAYS CENTERED AT NIGHT

ALWAYS CENTERED AT NIGHT

★★★★☆

It's 25 years since Moby released *Play* – the biggest-selling electronica album of all time. While he'll hardly be expected to do those numbers again, *Always Centered At Night* is arguably his most inventive LP since that magnum opus.

For those who've been paying attention, Moby launched a record label of the same name in 2022, with the intention of circumventing what he described as the "current, fear-driven, algorithmic-based culture". Each release so far has been a collaboration between Moby and another chosen artist – including Lady Blackbird, Aynzli Jones and JP Bimeni – to make twilit works that he hopes will excite listeners, just as Moby was excited himself by new sounds when shopping for records on the Lower East Side in the 80s.



Moby often talks a good game, so it's a relief that opener *On Air* with Serpentwithfeet ushers in the sort of remarkable beauty we've been told to expect, with the musical textures never less than edifying throughout. Another gem is *Where Is Your Pride?* with the late, great Benjamin Zephaniah providing a propulsive meeting of minds.

Always Centered At Night collects all of these voices together on an album for the first time, as Moby himself collects voices from around the world like some benign lepidopterist, capturing exquisite butterflies and then letting them go again.
Jeremy Allen

JOHN GRANT
THE ART OF THE LIE

BELLA UNION

★★★★☆

For his sixth album, John Grant finds the United States at a perilous precipice where shit is accelerating towards the fan: a place where a cult-like fervour of medieval attitudes has gripped the easily led. *The Art Of The Lie* – a nod to a certain ex-President's book *The Art Of The Deal* – doesn't hold back.

Opener *All That School For Nothing* has a Zapp-nodding itchy funk swagger, with Grant like a futuristic narrator as his voice is vocodered up – something he turns to on several tracks. The elastic ping of sweaty sequencers in *Meek AF* and the pant-tightening strut of *It's A Bitch* are begging to be reswizzled for the dancefloor.

The main flavour of the album is Vangelis, where astral synths ripple, zip and bounce off each other, to give a feel of being weightless in the incredible, spectral mood of *The Child Catcher.* Those same synths encounter contortions of turbulence halfway through in *Marbles* and flow ethereally in *Daddy.* Meanwhile, *Father* is a lo-fi, heartfelt and emotional memorial of Grant's young life which could make concrete cry, followed by *Mother And Son* combining to make a parental suite.

The Art Of The Lie may feel a lot to take in at first, but rapidly evolves into its own fantastic world, an atmosphere evoking greats such as Kate Bush and Talk Talk – and one that you will happily escape into time and time again.
Ian Wade

BON JOVI
FOREVER

EMI

★★★★☆

Jon Bon Jovi has certainly had a rollercoaster few years. On the bright side, Bon Jovi were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame and have celebrated the 40th anniversary of their self-titled debut album with an extensive, well-regarded new documentary, *Thank You, Goodnight*.

In less happy news, Jon has been navigating persistent vocal problems – namely an atrophying vocal cord – that required major surgery, as documented in the Disney+ series.

Jon has spent nearly two years doing vocal exercises to get in shape, efforts that pay off here. Co-produced by Jon and guitarist John Shanks, standard for Bon Jovi since 2005's *Have A Nice Day*, LP number 16 emphasises their strengths: confident songs brimming with optimism and vulnerability, taking the form of yearning mid-tempo rockers (*Waves*), grand power balladry (*Seeds*) and bombast-filled riffage (the TalkBox guitar effect in *Living Proof* calls back to the robo intro of *Livin' On A Prayer*).

Forever really starts cooking on the second side, with ferocious rocker *The People's House* and power-pop highlight *Walls Of Jericho*. But the back half also includes two tender moments: the sentimental *My First Guitar* and piano ballad *I Wrote You A Song*. The album's title seems apt: *Forever* is a canny statement on legacy – and Bon Jovi's timeless resilience. **Annie Zaleski**

BLUR
LIVE AT WEMBLEY STADIUM

PARLOPHONE

★★★★☆

Blur's fourth live album (the first to be available on vinyl) follows *All The People* from 2009 and 2012's *Parklive*. Both of them were recorded at Hyde Park, and neither could compete with 1996's fiery *Live At The Budokan*.

While Hyde Park can make for a fun day out, it's nobody's idea of a great location for its acoustics. Maybe there has been a great live album recorded there, but *Classic Pop* can't think of any. Instead, the prospect of playing Wembley Stadium

reignited Damon Albarn's competitive streak: Blur had never performed there before, so it was about time that was corrected.

As anyone lucky enough to have been at Wembley in 2023 can attest, the resulting two shows were among the best any stadium has ever witnessed. A standalone Blu-Ray/DVD film of the gigs would be welcome in addition to new comeback documentary *To The End*, but the 16-song audio does an excellent job of showcasing how great Blur are whenever they want to get together again.

Romping through a perfectly chosen best-of set, the band bring a communal shiver to the ballads – which means they'd saved enough energy to make *Song 2*, *Girls And Boys* and *The Ballad Of Darren* highlight *St Charles Square* sound as electrifying as if Blur still had it all to prove. It makes for the live album current Blur deserve. **JE**

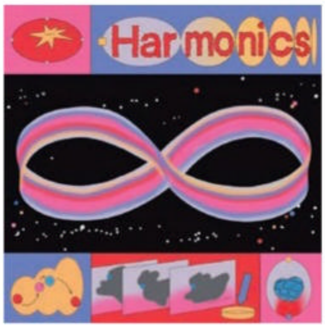
JOE GODDARD
HARMONICS

DOMINO

★★★★☆

Whether it's via his central role in Hot Chip, his partnership with Raf Rundell in 2 Bears or in the producer's chair for other artists, Joe Goddard has a reputation for being a safe pair of hands. If he's involved, it's a fair bet any resulting music is going to be danceable and imbued with the warm pulse of classic house without, crucially, resorting to shopworn clichés.

So it proves on Goddard's third solo album. Working just as well as home listening as it doubtless will in the clubs,



some may point out that much of this sounds comforting rather than groundbreaking. But since when did dance music by definition have to pursue the cutting edge?

If there is a flaw, it's a familiar one for producers' albums – a surfeit of featured vocalists leading to a dilution in identity. There are 11 different guests spread across these 14 tracks, from the unmistakably refined tones of ex-Wild Beasts frontman Hayden Thorpe on deep house shuffler *Summon* to Ibibio Sound System, who collaborate on the soaring Afrobeats standout, *Progress*. Good as these all are, *Harmonics* often feels like a collection of tracks, rather than an *album*. But really this is quibbling. This is another fine addition to Goddard's now extensive discography and proves once again that if he's at the controls you're in for something consistently enjoyable. **Beth Simpson**

PAUL McCARTNEY & WINGS
ONE HAND CLAPPING

CAPITOL

★★★½☆

For an international superstar, Paul McCartney has a fine tradition of messing about: low-key pseudonymous albums as The Fireman and Twin Freaks, remix projects such as *Ill Imagined*, chomping celery for Super Furry Animals... Even by his standards, though, *One Hand Clapping* is an odd one.

When *Band On The Run* was No.1 in 1974, Wings assembled at Abbey Road Studios to record a TV documentary. Its director David Litchfield filmed them covering The Moody Blues'

Go Now, a few crooner favourites including *Baby Face*, as well as The Beatles' *Lady Madonna*, *The Long And Winding Road* and *Let It Be* among Wings gems.

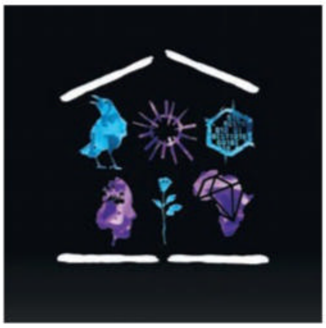
What was it actually about? No one seems sure. It was never released and, 50 years on, it still isn't. But its resulting 27 songs are present, across two LPs and two CDs for the album's first official release. Widely bootlegged and with much of it heard as extras on previous reissues, its first full outing shows Wings as loose and pressure-free as it gets: *Band On The Run* slides about with a delicious sleaze, the then-unreleased *I'll Give You A Ring* sees Macca pay homage to his pre-rock'n'roll roots, a brief *Let It Be* starts with a delirious "Yahoo!" before he gives it plenty over a church organ arrangement.

Giving *Back To The Egg* and *London Town* overdue deluxe editions would be more necessary, but Macca unleashed deserves a round of applause. **JE**

GLASS ANIMALS
I LOVE YOU SO F***ING MUCH
POLYDOR

★★☆☆☆

What should an ostensibly indie band (albeit one with a heavily treated sound) do after a huge global hit? On the evidence of the fourth LP by the Oxford quartet, the answer is more of the same. There are plenty more would-be *Heat Waves* here, all at a similar head-nodding tempo, and all with that vaporous quality so common in modern pop – only the swaying doo wop-influenced *Lost In The Ocean* sticks in the memory. Its title may implore passionately, but it's hard to feel anything much about this except indifference. **BS**



MARILLION
AN HOUR BEFORE IT'S DARK: LIVE IN PORT ZÉLANDE 2023
EARMUSIC

★★★★☆

Proving that everything comes back into fashion eventually – even Marillion – this live 2CD/3LP/Blu-Ray document of the resurgent neo-proggers' recent Top 5 LP is the jubilant sound of Britain's most misunderstood band enjoying the last laugh. Recorded at last year's Marillion Weekend, when 3,000 fans took over a Dutch Center Parcs, the charged atmosphere adds drama to late-career classics such as *The Crow And The Nightingale* and *Care*, a tribute to Covid's NHS heroes that leaves not a dry eye in the tent. **Paul Kirkley**

TRAVIS
L.A. TIMES
BMG

★★★★☆

From the *We Didn't Start The Fire*-aping tirade of the title track to the rabble rousing, splenetic *The River*, Travis are out to cause a ruckus on their 10th album. Whether it's that milestone or Fran Healy's divorce that's caused the turmoil, it's made for heightened creativity. Opener *Bus* and *Live It All Again* are familiar tuneful strums. But you're just as likely to find Madness-style vaudeville romps like *Gaslight* or the extraordinary glam rage of *I Hope That You Spontaneously Combust* as you will Travis' traditional affability. **JE**

HUMANIST
ON THE EDGE OF A LOST AND LONELY WORLD
BELLA UNION

★★★★☆

The alias of ex-Exit Calm guitarist Rob Marshall, Humanist recently supported Depeche Mode and Dave Gahan duly guests on the trad ballad *Brother*. Glasvegas' James Allan, Ed Harcourt and BRMC's Peter Hayes also feature, as Marshall holds it all together recalling Cousteau's grandeur and Sparklehorse's intensity. Former Midlake singer Tim Smith adds almost unbearable intimacy to *Too Many Rivals*, while Marshall's vocals suggest he'd fare just fine on his own. A dark triumph of bending guests to your will. **JE**

KASABIAN
HAPPENINGS
COLUMBIA

★★★★☆

After a tentative start on previous album *The Alchemist's Euphoria* in 2022, Serge Pizzorno now seems fully settled in as Kasabian's frontman. Not only are full-on anthems like *G.O.A.T.* and *Algorithms* back, the 29-minute runtime means any songs not to one's taste quickly pass by: Kasabian shouldn't ever resemble RHCP, thanks, *Passengers*. Pizzorno's recent experimental touches are here – *Italian Horror* pulls off bittersweet pop, *The Hell Of It* fits in half-a-dozen confident ideas every 30 seconds resulting in a fabulously disorientating brief blast of hyper-colour pop. **JE**

KATE NASH
9 SAD SYMPHONIES
KILL ROCK STARS

★★★★☆

At 36, Kate Nash already bears the scars of two decades in the music industry, but the former teenage MySpace sensation's fifth album eschews what Nash calls the "ragey" tone of her recent output by adding sweeping strings to her trademark piano. Lyrically, she's as sharp as ever, her tumbling vocals mixing confessional tales of anxiety ("I eat my dinner in the toilets at lunch") and heartbreak with barbed witticisms directed at everyone from shady boyfriends (*Wasteman*) to Stanley Kubrick (*Space Odyssey 2001* – "Oh my god, this film is so fucking long"). **PK**

FLORRIE
THE LOST ONES
XENOMANIA

★★★☆☆

Formerly Xenomania's in-house drummer, Florrie Arnold graduated to writing singles for The Saturdays and Girls Aloud. But, like an early Raye, her major label deal with Sony failed and she quit music. Back nine years on, Florrie's best – generally the uptempo tunes – are as dramatic as her backstory. *Kissing In The Cold* is worthy of Annie, which isn't to be said lightly. But the album's second half dissolves into anonymous ballads, an anodyne mood only interrupted by a new take on 2011 single *I Took A Little Something*. At least there are hints of imperial-era Xenomania here. **JE**

WILL GREGORY MOOG ENSEMBLE
HEAT RAY
MUTE

★★★★☆

The prospect of a multi-Moog suite inspired by a Greek mathematician may hold no more or less appeal than Wendy Carlos' *Switched-On Bach*. This, though, is no novelty set, flush with the invention and entertainment Gregory provides as half of Goldfrapp. More New Classical than much New Classical, it hints at brassy baroque on *Young Archimedes* and moody grandeur on *Circles, Spirals And Pi*, while *The Claw* is ambitiously modern, if still cinematic. Portishead's Adrian Utley and Mute's Daniel Miller lend their analogue skills. **Wyndham Wallace**

DURAN DURAN

DURAN DURAN/RIO/SEVEN AND THE RAGGED TIGER/NOTORIOUS/BIG THING

WARNER

★★★★★ / ★★★★★ / ★★★☆☆ / ★★★★☆ / ★★★★☆

A NO-FRILLS RE-RELEASE OF THE FIRST FIVE DURAN DURAN ALBUMS HAS THEM SOUNDING (MOSTLY) SHINY AGAIN

More of an admin exercise rather than a full-on reissue campaign, getting the first five Duran Duran albums back out properly on vinyl and CD follows the successful and similarly low-key strategy that made the band's post-EMI LPs from *Medazzaland* to *All You Need Is Now* readily available.

Once that was completed with *Pop Trash* a year ago, Duran realised that fans couldn't buy their landmark first five LPs – that felt remiss, especially as the remastered versions from 2010 had never been available outside of their deluxe reissues at the time.

So, with a minimum of fuss, you can now get each album again, with the CDs housed in eco-friendly card sleeves rather than jewel cases. That's welcome, especially considering *Big Thing* is hard to find on vinyl, whereas the other four albums are possibly *too* easy to buy cheaply second-hand.

With the artwork transfers overseen by original designer Malcolm Garrett, treat yourself to *Rio* looking as shiny as it should.

While the band still tease the arrival of the *Duranthology* boxset they've promised since roughly the *Astronaut* reunion, it's no surprise that the remasters haven't been updated. It means the version of *Drug (It's Just A State Of Mind)* on *Big Thing* is the one the band finally fixed in 2010, rather than the botched mix of its 1988 release that caused John Taylor to nearly quit on the spot. However, it also means the overly trebly mixing in vogue at the time – before vinyl came back into fashion – is still in place. The debut LP in particular suffers from John's bass being too low in the mix.

Whether the band will remaster the LPs again for *Duranthology* or another project, who knows? More importantly, if Duran are talking to their old label Warner again, can we please finally have *The Wedding Album* and *Thank You* back out on vinyl, and in proper 2LP editions, so fans don't have to spend £250 on Discogs for a copy of the covers LP that sounds like it was pressed on leftover flexidiscs?

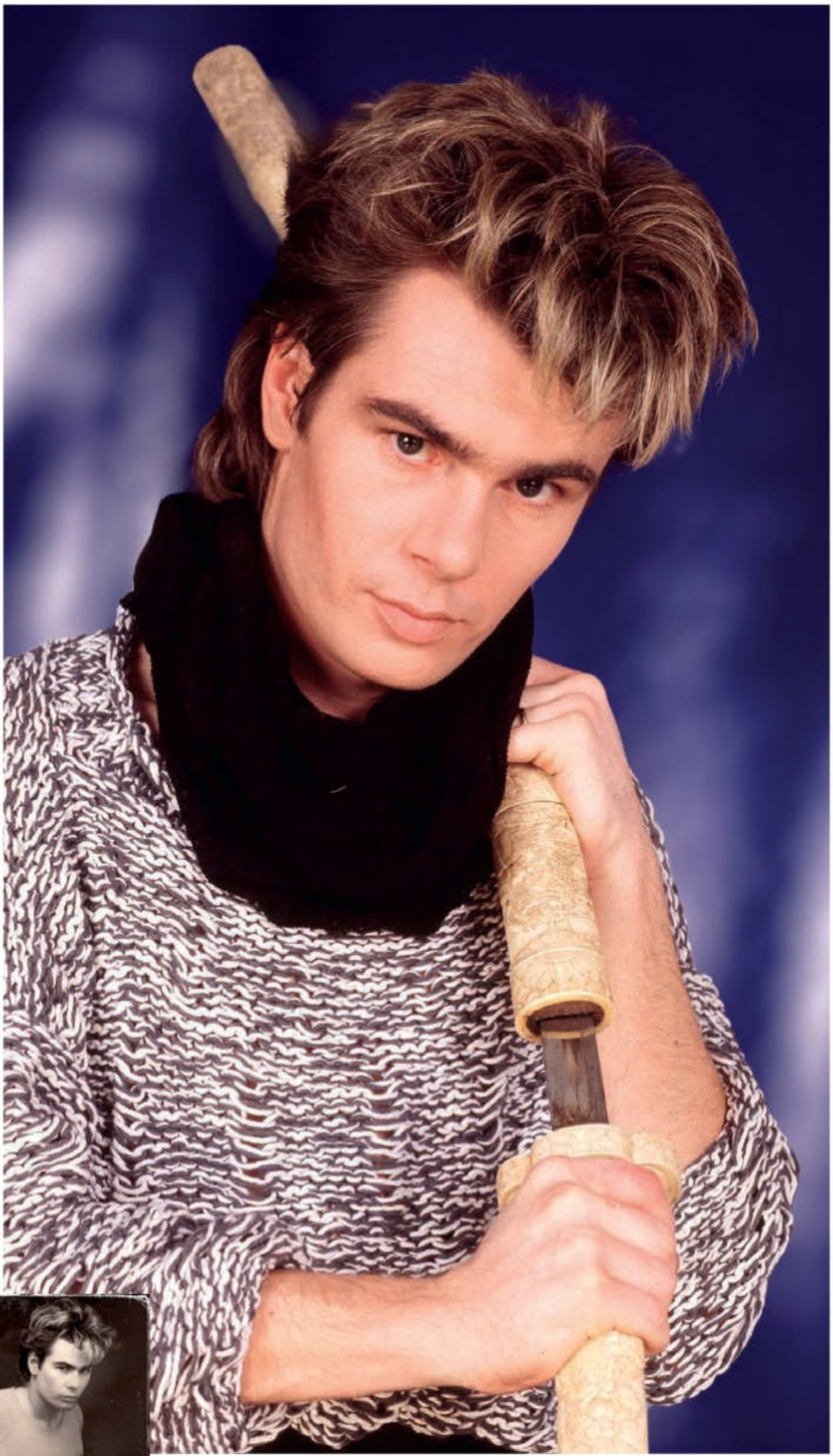
By now, *Classic Pop* readers have surely made their minds up on the albums themselves. Either you recognise Duran's first two albums are among mankind's greatest achievements, or you're a clot. Even Duran think that *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* is a bit of an addled mess, before they somehow pulled *Notorious* together, thanks in large part to Nile Rodgers. And *Big Thing* is far more than the 'Duran go rave' claims it's become stereotyped as, partly thanks to its artwork. An adventurous, diverse work, it's closer to Arcadia than Adamski. That's the album most in need of these reissues – but it's great just to have Duran's early years looking pristine again. **John Earls**

NIK KERSHAW
THE MCA YEARS

CHERRY POP

★★★★☆

A LONG-OVERDUE BOXSET FOR THE SINGER-SONGWRITER WHO BROUGHT A PROGGY FLOURISH TO THE 80s CHARTS



In the 40 years since Nik Kershaw burst out of Ipswich with the hit albums *Human Racing* and *The Riddle*, both released in 1984, it's bizarre that there hasn't been a proper overview of his career until now.

Not only is this 10CD+1DVD collection the first Kershaw boxset, none of his multiple compilations have charted, all are seemingly cheap and cheerful affairs rather than giving his work due diligence. So *The MCA Years* – running from *Human Racing* to fourth album *The Works* in 1989 – is finally chance to assess how Kershaw managed to straddle both synth-pop's prime era and coping in the more earnest post-Live Aid years, having been on the bill above the likes of Adam Ant, Ultravox and The Style Council at Wembley Stadium.

Overseen by Kershaw, the boxset is thorough on what you'd expect, with discs devoted to his B-sides, remixes and edits. The highlight is the first full release of a 20-song 1984 live show captured at Hammersmith Odeon around *The Riddle* across the final two CDs.

Twelve of that show's songs are also on the DVD, additionally housing the videos for the era's 13 singles. That's excellent but, Hammersmith apart, there aren't any surprises of unreleased songs or demos. Considering each album is left in its original unexpanded form on CDs one to four and there are just eight songs on the B-sides CD, there was certainly room for a handful of work-in-progress tracks.

What *The MCA Years* proves is that Kershaw never quite fitted in, even while *Wouldn't It Be Good* and *Don Quixote* were massive. If he was too in thrall to pop to be labelled as prog, he had more in common with Tears For Fears' quest to find true meaning than simply settling for big dumb fun.

It all climaxed with third album, 1986's *Radio Musicola*. If Kershaw should have kept Peter Collins on instead of producing it himself, the occasionally dated style can't hide songs bristling with tension and paranoia, one of the most fraught and unsettling fame comedown albums.

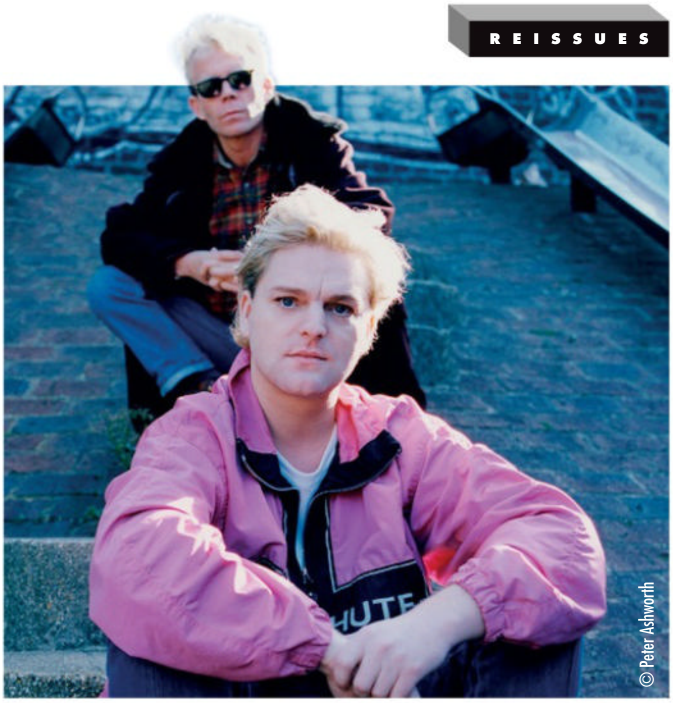
In truth, *The Works* tries too hard to return Kershaw to the mainstream and loses his charm in its muddled production – but he deserved better than to quit altogether for a decade when *The Works* didn't chart, even if he did have the Chesney Hawkes songwriting royalties to tide him over in between.

With his 12" singles an excuse to get yet more adventurous by extending the songs rather than hand them over to big-name remixers, and B-sides such as anthemic piano ballad *So Quiet* are further evidence of his songwriting's breadth, Nik Kershaw deserved this boxset all along. Why *did* it take 40 years to materialise? **JE**

ERASURE
COWBOY

MUTE

★★★★☆



© Peter Ashworth

Known to most devotees as 'The album where Vince dressed as a cactus on tour', 1997's *Cowboy* is Erasure reminding fans and themselves what they stood for. After the muddled *I Say I Say I Say* detonated their commercial peak and the self-titled album was their prog equivalent, *Cowboy* returned Clarke and Andy Bell to pure pop and, as a result, the UK Top 10.

Although Bell has been slightly sniffy about 1990s Erasure, *Cowboy* doesn't sound like a duo reluctantly trying to recapture past glories. The last Erasure album before *Tomorrow's World* 14 years later to be wholly produced by external associates, the reliable Gareth Jones teamed up with Prodigy engineer Neil McLellan to oversee an instantly familiar array of pop straight out of the *Circus* template. Only the artwork and Sergio Leone riff in *Treasure* explicitly reference *Cowboy*'s title, and the rest of *Treasure* is as giddy as *Love To Hate You*.

The same urgency applies to *Reach Out*'s evocation of *Oh L'Amour*, while *In My Arms* was Erasure's most addictive single since *Always*. The ballads thrived, too, keeping the grace of the self-titled LP while overlaying a high-end pop shine: *Love Affair* deserves to be more familiar.

Clarke & Bell's prolific workrate of the time is demonstrated by the three rare tracks added to the 2CD reissue, previously only featured on the *Buried Treasure II* compilation. (The vinyl is freely available since 2016's reissue, so there's no accompanying repress of that format).

Although *Earth* doesn't add much, *My Love* scurries about gleefully and *In The Name Of The Heart* is sumptuous pop which belonged with the main album. As is standard with Erasure's current reissues, there's an argument that Mute should add B-sides and mixes on a third CD.

In focussing on new mixes and rarities, they leave out the regular versions of *Rapture* and *Heart Of Glass*, while remixes by Jon Pleased Wimmin, Matt Darey, Tin Tin Out and Tall Paul are all missing. At least the new Blancmange and Stealing Sheep mixes are a treat. **JE**

DAVID BOWIE
ROCK 'N' ROLL STAR!

PARLOPHONE

★★★★★

JULY/AUG 2024 CLASSIC POP BEST REISSUE

Parts of an artist's discography can become too familiar. A case in point is the music Bowie made during his glam rock-powered ascent to superstardom. Somewhere, Ziggy Stardust, whose success threatened to overwhelm his creator as the kids almost killed the man, is *always* playing guitar. Really, what's left to learn here?

Plenty, as the latest entry in Parlophone's album-by-album trawl through Bowie's archives proves by illuminating how *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* went to the heart of our collective culture. Where bootlegs have made a lo-fi mess of the story, *Rock 'N' Star!* brings clarity over five CDs via an adroitly sequenced mix of demos, BBC recordings, rehearsal tapes, live tracks and outtakes, such as the rockabilly-tinged *It's Gonna Rain Again* as well as a fierce pre-*Pin Ups* take on The Who's *I Can't Explain*. A Blu-Ray audio disc completes the tale, with *Waiting In The Sky*, an 'alternate *Ziggy*' first released for Record Store Day, and the original album in two different mixes.

With 29 previously unreleased tracks, revelations abound, beginning with opener *So Long 60s*, a *Moonage Daydream* sketch recorded in a San Francisco hotel – and featuring lyrics that find Bowie seemingly yearning to leave behind a decade where he struggled to cut through. A demo of *Star* captures something of the same vibe. "If someone had the sense to hear me," sings Bowie, rather too plaintively.

But things fast come into focus as Bowie's confidence grows. It's revealing, too, to hear the Spiders grow tighter over multiple BBC sessions. By the time Bowie famously draped his arm around Mick Ronson while performing *Starman* on *Top Of The Pops*, this was the most well-honed rock'n'roll band out there.

Add in two books – one that features rarely seen photos, sleevenotes, interviews and essays, the other reproducing Bowie notebook pages – and, in making you hear Ziggy anew, *Rock 'N' Roll Star!* is the boxset it deserves. A single LP vinyl edit is also available.

Jonathan Wright

© The David Bowie Archive / Photo by Masayoshi Sukita

SEAL
SEAL

RHINO

★★★★½

IN THE BRITPOP ERA, SEAL AND PRODUCER TREVOR HORN FOUND A WAY TO INNOVATE, DIFFERENTIATE AND DELIVER A KNOCKOUT SECOND RECORD, PROVING THE STAR'S 1991 DEBUT STUDIO ALBUM WAS NO FLUKE

Although it's become unofficially known as *Seal II*, Seal's second album, released in May 1994, was oddly once again eponymous. As with its predecessor, it hit the top of the UK album charts, while its No.15 placing was an improvement Stateside. Trevor Horn then repeated the production tricks from the debut, sprinkling his intricate details into the nooks and crevices to land another gem. The quality of those first two Seal records can never be overstated.

Released for album two's 30th anniversary, Rhino seem to have taken on board the criticisms of the original *Seal* reissue which left one side of the vinyl set blank, by filling out all four sides of the 2LP this time around.

Although *Kiss From A Rose* received the lion's share of plaudits at the time, becoming an iconic track with a little help from *Batman Forever*, *Prayer For The Dying* more than holds its own in terms of melody and killer hooks, too. Meanwhile, the guitar work on *Seal II* from Londoner Gus Isidore sits perfectly with the synth beats of the singer's signature sound. From the funky groove of opener *Bring It On*, soulful *Dreaming In Metaphors*, rousing *Don't Cry* through to the upbeat *Newborn Friend*, the songs have aged gracefully. There is barely a weak link on the album.

Alternative versions of the original LP (only available on the CD+Blu-Ray version) are subtle and closely similar on first listen. The exception is *If I Could*, featuring Wendy Melvoin from Wendy & Lisa instead of Joni Mitchell. That reworked effort simply doesn't have the same grandeur, soul or glamour as the epic original.

The treasures on this reprised edition – this time also on vinyl – are the sonically charged *Reality*, which is previously unreleased but could have easily made the final cut on the initial album, and the edgy, industrial rock feel of *Love Is Powerful*, strangely only released in Japan before.

The new reissue also brings together the various B-sides and standalone cuts from this period including a cover of the Steve Miller Band's *Fly Like An Eagle* (from the *Space Jam* movie soundtrack) featuring the brilliant combination of D'Angelo and Nile Rodgers, and a foray into Hendrix's *Manic Depression* recorded with Jeff Beck for Jimi tribute album *Stone Free*.

This is a fine reimagining of a strong album, whose cover artwork has become a defining image of the musician. All that is missing is a handful of extended versions and live tracks from the period. **Lee Campbell**

TANITA TIKARAM
THE WEA/EASTWEST ALBUMS 1988-1995

CHERRY RED

★★★½☆

Renowned for her inherently sombre melodies, world-weary vocal delivery and a way with words that's Leonard Cohen-esque, Tanita Tikaram could be described as a progenitor of the tortured poets department, as this exhaustive five-disc overview of her early career shows.

Of course, Tikaram's glass-half-empty demeanour reaped rewards with her 1988 LP *Ancient Heart*,

a four-million-selling, twice-BRIT-nominated debut which pervaded the nation's consciousness enough to inspire a *French & Saunders* parody. The haunting *Twist In My Sobriety*, surely pop's best use of the oboe, still sounds majestic 36 years later, while UK Top 10 smash *Good Tradition* and the uncharacteristically summery *World Outside Your Window* proved the then-19-year-old could occasionally cut loose.

1990 follow-up LP *The Sweet Keeper* mined a similar brand of deeply melancholic folk, jazz and soul tailormade for dinner parties, and to similarly evocative effect. But by sticking with Mike + The Mechanics drummer Peter Van Hooke and The Zombies founder Rod Argent as producers for a third time, 1991's *Everybody's Angel* was the sound of an artist going

through the motions, with even the presence of Tikaram's vocal hero Jennifer Warnes unable to ignite much of a spark.

1992's self-produced *Eleven Kinds Of Loneliness* saw Tikaram expand her horizons, notably on the Walker Brothers-esque *You Make The Whole World Cry*. But it was 1995's career-best *Lovers In The City* where she threw caution to the wind, working with Oscar-nominated composer Thomas Newman on a more adventurous, if still resolutely brooding, blend of avant-garde pop, trip-hop and even yodelling.

Adapted from the same-named Stevie Smith poem, spellbinding orchestral number *Not Waving But Drowning* is the highlight of the B-sides, alternate takes and single edits that pushes *The WEA/ EastWest Albums* boxset to a colossal 81 tracks in total.

While that's a lot of moroseness in one sitting, this first chapter retrospective proves that there's more to The Bard Of Basingstoke than her two hits. **Jon O'Brien**

THE OTHER TWO
THE OTHER TWO & YOU

WARNER

★★★½☆

Interrupting their run of deluxe New Order reissues, it comes as a happy surprise – not least to Gillian Gilbert and Stephen Morris – that Warner are reissuing both albums by The Other Two.

The Other Two & You from 1993 and 1999's *Super Highways* were both reissued in 2020 by Factory Benelux, with an array of B-sides and remixes from the likes of Moby and Pascal Gabriel that have been excised here. However, this is the first time the albums have been repressed on

vinyl, and the first time they've been remastered.

To belatedly fit *The Other Two & You*'s CD-only bustling bonus track *Loved It* onto vinyl, an unused radio edit by Love To Infinity replaces the original of *Innocence*: a pain for completists, but it's a gem of a mix that maximises the song's inherent pop under its rave roots.

Given that the album started life as a putative soundtrack collection of Morris and Gilbert's work for TV shows such as *Making Out* and *Cold Feet*, only *Ninth Configuration* betrays The Other Two's roots in incidental music, an industrial sci-fi instrumental similar to Orbital's later work on the *Event Horizon* score. The other instrumental, *Spirit Level* is a more full-on club moment that doesn't need any vocal input.

It's stretching it to say that Gillian Gilbert is as natural a singer as the duo's initial

frontwoman plan of Kim Wilde, but she brings much of her keyboardist imperious cool to her voice, which fits neatly next to Banderas and Saint Etienne in the era's conversational vocalists. If Gilbert still won't reveal who caused her ire, the blunt anger in *Selfish* is an especially fine use of her coldness.

On a loved-up tip, *Feel This Love* sits next to *Innocence* and near-hit *Tasty Fish* to highlight how Gilbert and Morris excelled in continuing the euphoria of *Technique* on their own, with the smoky *Movin' On* the duo's biggest departure vocally and in its more organic sound. Expect *Super Highways* to get a similar treatment soon. **JE**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
NOW YEARBOOK THE VAULT '83

NOW

★★★★☆

Considering Now's whole ethos is to celebrate the best chart music, its new *The Vault* series is a genuine innovation for the label: let's now showcase the best songs that *weren't* hits.

It's not an idea unique to Now: Gary Crowley's *Lost 80s* compilations did an exemplary job of reminding people that the public didn't always get it right, having shunned Paul Haig, Intaferon and The Redskins.

Now also repeats Crowley's obvious move of highlighting lesser-known songs by big acts: the first *Vault* includes Adam Ant's *Strip*, Gary Numan's *Sister Surprise* and Culture Club's *I'll Tumble 4 Ya* over four CDs.

Where the first *Vault* scores maximum points is repeating Now's Yearbook formula of sticking to one year. Yes, all 80 tracks are from 1983 and, no, previous anthologies haven't got close to hoovering up the year's treasures. Whatever you're into, there'll be gasps of delight at Now deciding it's the right time for, say, Marc And The Mambas' pop-goth majesty of *Black Heart*, Whodini's club banger *Magic's Wand* or pre-Underworld collective Freur's *Doot Doot*.

All done with typically excellent sequencing, whatever year's next, there's room for Yearbook's sister *Yearbook Extra* series for 1983's *Vault*, too. That would settle any debates on not including Jimmy The Hoover, Big Sound Authority or Intaferon on Volume 1. **JE**

SHAMPOO
COMPLETE!

90/9

★★★★☆

Jacqui Blake and Carrie Askew, aka proud troublemakers Shampoo, mischievously bridged the sizeable mid-90s gap between *Smash Hits* and *NME* with a mix of brat pop, New Wave and bubblegum punk that, contrary to Spice Girls lore, birthed the term 'Girl power'. *Complete*, boasting the duo's three albums, plus a comprehensive collection of B-sides and remixes and all of their brilliantly playful videos, proves that they deserved to be as big as their mantra adopters.

Home to should-have-been-No.1 signature hit *Trouble* and the Miley Cyrus-covered *Delicious*, 1994 debut *We Are Shampoo* remains a statement of intent, whether dissing Mariah and Whitney on *Dirty Old Love Song*, causing chaos on *Shiny Black Taxi Cab* or showing East 17 how it's done on *House Of Love*.

1996 follow-up *Girl Power* didn't fare so well, but the title track and spirited take on The Waitresses' *I Know What Boys Like* still held plenty of their Bananarama-meets-Beastie Boys charm. But it is 2000's *Absolute Shampoo*, previously unavailable physically, that'll have Shampooheads in a lather, particularly the dreamy Saint Etienne-esque *Take A Break* and kitschy *Inspector Gadget*. Early singles *Bouffant Headbutt* and *Blisters And Bruises* provide hints of their Manics fangirl roots, while *Cars* pipped Sugababes to the Gary Numan-covering punch. *Viva La Megababes* indeed. **JO**

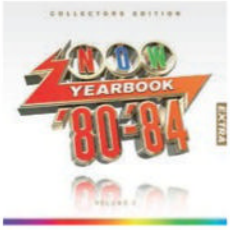
VARIOUS ARTISTS
NOW YEARBOOK '93 / NOW YEARBOOK 74 EXTRA / NOW 40 YEARS: PART TWO / NOW YEARBOOK VINYL EXTRA '80-'84: VOLUME II / NOW MILLENNIUM '06-'07 /

NOW

★★★★☆ / ★★★★☆ / ★★★★☆ / ★★★★★ / ★★★★☆

Now never stops, and thank heavens for that. The varied compilations to excite and delight this month sees 1993 getting the 3LP/4CD Yearbook treatment, with a vault of pop magic. An interesting year, euro rave was fast becoming the dominant pop force via Ace Of Base and Haddaway, while Take That entered their imperial phase and the post-Nirvana slipstream saw anyone in possession of a flannel shirt scooped up by a major label.

1993 was also full of veterans' wonders including *Can You Forgive Her?*, *Regret* and Crowded House's *Distant Sun*, while Eternal, Urban Cookie Collective, Shaggy and Gabrielle happily landed on Planet Pop for the first time.



The spectacular 3CD *Yearbook Extra 74* doesn't mess around either, with room for *Love's Theme*, *Machine Gun* and *TSOP*, along with further digs into the fabulous Elton, Faces, Slade, Barry White and Sparks back catalogues.

Following on from last year's 40th anniversary bonanza, the second *40 Years* is another eclectic 5CD whirl around highlights from 1983 to 2023, ranging chronologically from *Is There Something I Should Know?* to Olivia Rodrigo's *Vampire*, and via classics including *Two Tribes*, *Buffalo Stance*, *Born Slippy* and *Paranoid Android*: Now knows what hits to select from one year or 40 years.

Yet another no-brainer parade of ace is the 5LP/*Yearbook '80-'84 Vinyl Extra Part 2* featuring *A Forest*, *Da Da Da*, *Poison Arrow* and *Love Action* among its jewels. The boxset's title might be fiddly, but seriously: John Foxx, Dollar, Divine and Devo all on one album? YES PLEASE.

And finally, the *Millennium* series hits 2006-07, a high watermark of pop with solid gold classics including *Rehab*, *Bleeding Love*, *Young Folks*, *Maneater* and *I Don't Feel Like Dancin'*. And then there's the arrival of Lily Allen, Gnarls Barkley, Mika and The Feeling. Crikey. So much for 'They don't make pop like they used to', because if nothing among that lot can tempt you, then you're beyond hope.
Ian Wade

CRANES
COLLECTED WORKS VOLUME 1 1989-1997

CHERRY RED

★★★★☆

In the context of a world moving excitedly through acid house, grunge and Britpop, it was all too easy to dismiss Portsmouth's Cranes as goth throwbacks. And yet, as this 6CD set proves, there's a more nuanced story to tell about siblings Alison and Jim Shaw and the musicians they worked with through years when, however improbable this now seems, Cranes occasionally bothered the charts.

That isn't to say Cranes' early recordings weren't gloomy and introspective. 1989 mini-album *Self-Non-Self* is dense and insistently repetitious, close to industrial rock – Alison's little-girl-lost vocals sound especially eerie.

Helped along by support from John Peel, Cranes signed to Dedicated, and it's recordings for the RCA/Arista offshoot – *Wings of Joy*, *Forever*, *Loved* and *Population Four* – that make up the bulk of this boxset, alongside the curiosity *La Tragédie D'Oreste Et Électre*, with Shaw intoning words by Jean-Paul Sartre in French.

It makes for a fascinating tale, with the narrative one of a band letting in the light by incorporating dreampop, shoegaze and even neo-classical, without losing an off-kilter quality that's ensured their longevity. An underrated and yet hugely influential band caught here in their prime. **JW**

DEAD OR ALIVE
RUNNING WILD: THE INEVITABLE YEARS

CHERRY RED

★★★☆☆

When Pete Burns died in 2016, a little colour went out of national life. In the words of Boy George: "One of our great true eccentrics" had passed. More specifically, Burns was an autodidact divine creature, a larger-than-life figure with a near-tragic obsession with plastic surgery and seemingly perennial money problems, who nonetheless connected with the public, most notably via *Celebrity Big Brother*.

How did he create such a persona? Liverpool's punk scene is key. Burns' first band in 1977 was The Mystery Girls featuring Julian Cope and Pete Wylie. By 1980, Burns was fronting Dead Or Alive, whose first two singles were released via indie label Inevitable. They comprise Side One of this new compilation, pressed on berry-red vinyl.

Of those songs, *I'm Falling* is the best, a slice of latter-day Liverpool psychedelia that recalls early Teardrop Explodes. Second single *Number Eleven* is closer to Echo And The Bunnymen, and not as good. Make of that what you will.

Side Two, meanwhile, features tracks from two John Peel sessions. Overall, these recordings are post-punk snapshots, but there's an undeniable spirit. With a little recalibration, Burns would soon be spinning the world around and making it pay attention. **JW**

MORRISSEY
BEETHOVEN WAS DEAF

RHINO

★★★½☆

And so to Christmas 1992, after Morrissey's third solo LP, *Your Arsenal* – produced by Mick Ronson – has peaked at No.4, lasting just a month in the UK Top 40. He's already courting controversy with his fascination for skinhead culture and songs such as *The National Front Disco*, but his tribe remains large and loyal, a fact illustrated by both David Bowie's recent guest appearance at a US show and the sturdy audience responses on this live album.

With new artwork, and on vinyl for the first time since its release and CD for the first time since its deletion by EMI, *Beethoven Was Deaf* was recorded at Paris arena Le Zenith (and, apparently uncredited, in London). It features Alain Whyte on guitar, co-writer of most of *Your Arsenal*, and Boz Boorer, who remains Morrissey's musical director today.

Nonetheless, it reveals a man still finding his feet five years after The Smiths' split, with their familiar jangle still evident on the mournful *We'll Let You Know* and graceful *Seasick, Yet Still Docked*, and his rockabilly fantasies indulged on *Sister I'm A Poet*.

Morrissey also muscles up on furious finale *You're Gonna Need Someone On Your Side* and *November Spawned A Monster*, with its Sonic Youth blowout. Predictably, *Suedehead* stands tallest, an example of Morrissey playing to his vocal, melodic and lyrical strengths. **Wyndham Wallace**

MARCELLA DETROIT
JEWEL

LONDON

★★★★☆

Marcella Detroit's second solo album, 1994's *Jewel* emerged as her tenure in Shakespears Sister had come to an end. *Jewel* was in progress prior to the split, as the long-time songwriter – in amongst other things, Detroit co-wrote Eric Clapton's hit *Lay Down Sally* – worked on her own material.

Produced by Chris Thomas, *Jewel* featured several hits, led by UK No.11 first single *I Believe*. Guests included Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera and Jools Holland, who contributed

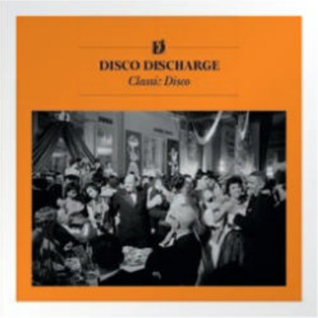
piano on the self-referential soul-funk chillout *Detroit*.

This expanded and remastered 30th anniversary version shows Detroit's versatility and range, encompassing powerhouse R&B (*James Brown*), exquisite alt-pop (*Prima Donna* exudes Kate Bush grandeur), and easygoing soul (a sterling duet with Elton John on a cover of *Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing*).

A bonus disc includes several acoustic versions, along with a stash of feelgood retro dance remixes, led by the newly-minted house anthem *Second Class Citizen*, a track Detroit wrote in the *Jewel* era. This new reissue also features an emotional 1994 solo take on Shakespears Sister's *Stay*, live at the Jazz Café, which conveys the classic's vulnerability and grace. Make no mistake, however, with the benefit of time, *Jewel* stands tall on its own and deserves a second look.
Annie Zaleski

MADNESS
THEATRE OF THE ABSURD PRESENTS C'EST LA VIE
BMG
★★★★☆

After 44 years, Madness' 13th LP became their first No.1 in 2023. No wonder it's already getting an expanded reissue, and one that's more comprehensive than many quick-fix overhauls. Seven songs from an exuberant London Koko club show include a cover of The Specials' *Friday Night, Saturday Morning* and the five outtakes could all have made the original album: *Hello Sun* and *No Reason* are Madness piano pop, with *I'd Do Anything* an atypically bassy reggae backbeat. One of their best, slightly better. **JE**



VARIOUS ARTISTS
DISCO DISCHARGE: CLASSIC DISCO/DISCO FEVER USA
DEMON
★★★★☆ / ★★★★☆

In the 2010s, the *Disco Discharge* series covered the cream of the outskirts of the mainstream dancefloor, all compiled by the mysterious curator Mr Pinks. Since relaunching with last year's outstanding *Box Of Sin* 5CD boxset that explored the influence gay nightlife had on 80s dance music, *Disco Discharge* is fully back, this time with slightly rejigged tracklists and making its debut on vinyl.

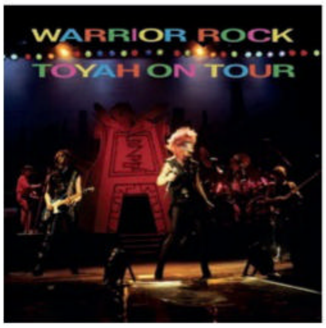
First, a truly magical thing, *Classic Disco* features belters such as Dr. Buzzard's swoony *Cherchez La Femme/Se Si Bon* alongside Cheryl Lynn's euphoric *Got To Be Real*, while *Disco Fever USA* contains essentials including Slick's peerless *Space Bass*, with Gloria Gaynor, Fern Kinney, Karen Young and a rare 12" instrumental version of Earth Wind & Fire's *Boogie Wonderland* also present. Superb work. **IW**

GINA G
FRESH!
90/9
★★★☆☆

Although generally thought of as a one-hit Eurovision wonder for 1996's *Ooh Aah... Just A Little Bit*, the Aussie's debut album features two other Top 10 entries, via the title track and *I Belong To You*. Alongside the original album on vinyl, the 2CD/1DVD edition houses remixes from expected pop names such as Phil Harding, Metro and Ian Curnow, joined by Todd Terry's garage excursion of *Every Time I Fall* and three Motiv8 mixes, their *Higher Than Love* the pick. All that and the sleeve is by David LaChapelle: for a while there, Gina G really was fresh. **JE**

LAIBACH
OPUS DEI
MUTE
★★★★½

In 1987, a group of military-clad Yugoslavian iconoclasts became an unlikely pop music sensation. Laibach have been largely misunderstood in the years since – as they like it – but there's no arguing with their third album. *Opus Dei* is full of martial industrial bangers like *Geburt Einer Nation* (a totalitarian reading of Queen's *One Vision*) and *Leben Heißt Leben* (a revelatory update of Opus' turgid *Live Is Life*). This new edition includes a cooking live second disc on the CD version, plus a 16-page booklet with images from anti-fascist collagist, John Heartfield. **Jeremy Allen**



TOYAH
WARRIOR ROCK
CHERRY RED
★★★★☆

With the original 2LP Hammersmith Odeon concert back out on vinyl, Toyah's first live album is expanded superbly across 3CDs to celebrate the whole of their 1982 UK tour. Drawing from soundchecks and the Brixton tour warm-up as well as 11 other full live performances, *Warrior Rock* now features the final live outing of *Life In The Trees* and the improvised *Hammersmith Jam*, alongside the first official tour release of *Bird In Flight* and *Neon Womb*. A wild celebration of a band enjoying their commercial success without needing to compromise for fans. **JE**

VARIOUS
NO SONGS TOMORROW
CHERRY RED
★★★½☆

Although celebrating the darkwave and coldwave scenes, by the end of this 4CD set you may not be any clearer as to what distinguishes those movements from goth. Soft Cell, Cocteau Twins, Danse Society and The Cure are here, as they would be on many other similarly themed compilations. A certain coldness is the main link, with avant-garde and neo-classical experimenters sitting happily next to atmospheric pop and ambience. It's hard to claim there's anything definitive about what it all stands for, but any box with both Alien Sex Fiend and Bel Canto can't be all bad. **JE**

LUTHER
LUTHER/THIS CLOSE TO YOU
SONY LEGACY
★★★½☆

Before he became a solo 80s R&B superstar, Luther Vandross fronted namesake band Luther. That quintet's criminally obscure and long-unavailable two albums from 1976 and 1977 are buried treasure no more – back out, in expanded versions to boot. Although R&B slow jams and harmony-rich 70s soul dominate, *Luther* boasts an occasionally funky edge and a dynamite cover of *Everybody Rejoice* from musical *The Wiz*, while the more confident second album *This Close To You* brims with string-twirled dance numbers and self-assured Vandross performances. **AZ**

© Dave Freak

JOHNNY MARR
THE CIVIC AT THE HALLS, WOLVERHAMPTON

7 APRIL

★★★★☆

JOHNNY MARR CELEBRATES HIS FIRST DECADE AS A BONA FIDE SOLO ARTIST WITH A CAREER-SPANNING SET WITH GAZ COOMBES PROVIDING ABLE SUPPORT

Though from different generations, both acts tonight have faced a similar dilemma: what do you do when your huge band splits?

For Johnny Marr, the answer seemed to initially lie in forging a career as a gun-for-hire and sideman, but for Gaz Coombes, there appeared no doubt that a solo career would beckon.

When Supergrass folded in 2010, Coombes slid comfortably into solo-dom without a pause, and (recent Supergrass live reunion aside), that's been his primary focus for over a decade with 2015's breakthrough Mercury Award-nominated second outing, *Matador*, signalling his increasingly appealing solo direction.

Gaz's Britpop-free 10-song set plays to his newfound strengths, swiftly showcasing inventive tunes from *Matador* onwards. From the 'saxy' standalone 2019 single *Salamander* and motoring rhythm of *Deep Pockets*, to the epic *20/20* and twitching *Walk The Walk*, he leaves us wanting more. Sure, a Supergrass banger would have been welcomed (who doesn't want to hear *Pumping On Your Stereo*?), but such a nostalgic burst would also be a distraction. For the time being at least, cutting The 'Grass is a sound move.

Unlike Gaz, Johnny F***ing Marr (to give him his full name), has no issues with retreading past glories. Or certainly some of them.

Oddly ignoring his JM And The Healers period, The Spirit Power Tour officially marks 10 years of Johnny as a bona fide solo artist.

It took a while for the ex-Smiths' guitarist to find his voice, with a quarter of a century of team-ups and guest spots between their final LP and his official solo debut, *The Messenger*. Since that belated move to centre stage, he has visibly (and musically) grown in confidence with every outing and now comfortably poses by the mic, slinging his guitar aloft, like any self-respecting axe hero always should.

Tonight's set is divided between recent solo adventures, The Smiths and his Electronic side project, traversing the best from all worlds. Hence the punchy *Generate! Generate!*, *Spirit Power And Soul* and the Smithsian jangle of *New Town Velocity*, all of which stand strong alongside classics *Panic* and *This Charming Man*.

Aware of the giant shadow cast by his past, Marr jokes that we shouldn't be frightened by new tunes, but is experienced enough to know *Somewhere*, *Walk Into The Sea* and *The Answer* will all be enthusiastically welcomed.

After a great take on Electronic's *Get The Message*, Marr asks for requests. Suggestions are bellowed, but it's aborted Smiths single, *You Just Haven't Earned It Yet, Baby*, that gets a surprise airing. A good fan choice.

The mutated Bo Diddley rhythm of *How Soon Is Now?* earns the evening's biggest cheer (and moshing outbreak), with *Easy Money* keeping the momentum going, although Iggy's *The Passenger* just feels merely adequate. Thankfully, The Smiths' *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* ensures he departs on a high.

With one foot in the 80s and early 90s, and another in the present, tonight's set confirms that Johnny Marr is far more than a mere sideman. In retrospect, his spirited late-career saunter into the spotlight took way too long, but has certainly been well worth the wait. **Dave Freak**

SETLIST
1. Sensory Street
2. Panic
3. Generate! Generate!
4. Spirit Power And Soul
5. New Town Velocity
6. This Charming Man
7. Somewhere
8. Walk Into The Sea
9. The Answer
10. Please, Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want
11. Bigmouth Strikes Again
12. Get The Message
13. You Just Haven't Earned It Yet, Baby
14. Hi Hello
15. How Soon Is Now?
16. Easy Money
17. Getting Away With It

ENCORE

18. The Passenger
19. There Is A Light That Never Goes Out

© Dave Freak

THOMPSON TWINS' TOM BAILEY

TOWN HALL, BIRMINGHAM

10 MAY

★★★☆☆

FORTY YEARS ON, AND WITH JUST ONE TWIN REMAINING, THE SECOND LEG OF THE THOMPSON TWINS' INTO THE GAP UK TOUR FINALLY GETS UNDERWAY WITH A JUBILANT SELL-OUT OPENING NIGHT

By the end of 1984, The Thompson Twins were international pop royalty. After two well-received (but under-selling) LPs, a reconfigured band had upped their game for 1983's *Quick Step & Side Kick*, although it was the following year's chart-topping *Into The Gap* that saw the trio really hit the big-time – a mid-80s classic that's getting a 40th anniversary reappraisal courtesy of Tom Bailey here.

But before his arrival there's time for a long-haired Geordie with access to a stunning back catalogue of songs unheard live for decades. Brother of Prefab Sprout's songwriting genius Paddy (currently M.I.A.), Martin McAloon's half-hour set promises a genuine treat for all: a swift run through the best of Prefab, and by a founding member to boot.

Beginning the set with *Cowboy Dreams* (a 1995 Jimmy Nail hit) and *Life Of Surprises*, it's a shaky start for the Prefab bassist-turned-guitarist – something he acknowledges, declaring: "You do know I'm not a singer... or a guitarist!"

In fact, it's all a little haphazard, although *When Love Breaks Down* elicits approving audience yelps before Martin "goes straight for the jugular" with well-received (if loose) stabs at *Cars And Girls* and *The King Of Rock'n'Roll*.

Despite the shortcomings, there's a rough charm to Martin's strumming and semi-spoken vocals, and where else are you going to hear these songs performed live by someone who originally shaped them?

Departing the stage to much cheering, McAloon appears to be genuinely touched by the warmth. "Phenomenal!" he grins, just as the house lights come up.

By contrast, Tom Bailey's set is – as you'd expect – a far slicker affair. Dressed in white with ever-present shades, and backed by a similarly-attired tight trio, he's a constantly moving presence, shifting from guitar to keyboards to electronic percussion, all while singing.

In The Name Of Love gets everyone on their feet instantly, while the less familiar solo tune *Science Fiction* keeps the energy levels high. A middling cover of Talking Heads' *Psycho Killer*, meanwhile, lacks power and is used as a buffer before Tom's shuffled-up run into *...The Gap*.

Sister Of Mercy, *You Take Me Up*, *Doctor! Doctor!* and main set closer *Hold Me Now* are all strong, with out-of-running-order low-key swayer *Storm On The Sea* relegated to the encore, where it's sandwiched between *Quick Step & Side Kick*'s cartoon-ish *We Are Detective* and a twitching closer in *Love On Your Side*.

Hearing the material again, perhaps surprising influences stand out. They're strong pop songs, but not without an element of experimentalism, too, as French accordion music, North American work songs, and Asian sounds all drift in.

Not everything works, though. The electronic drum kit has the right sound, yet lacks dynamism, while wandering Tom's vocals did miss the mark a smidgeon, and there's little audience engagement. But regardless, it's hard to imagine anyone not tucking into their breakfast the next day to a Thompson Twins playlist.

It may have taken 40 years to arrive, but a gap has finally been filled. **Dave Freak**

SETLIST

1. In The Name Of Love
2. Science Fiction
3. Lies
4. Lay Your Hands On Me
5. Runaway
6. If You Were Here
7. Shooting Star
8. Psycho Killer
9. The Gap
10. Day After Day
11. Sister Of Mercy
12. No Peace For The Wicked
13. You Take Me Up
14. Who Can Stop The Rain?
15. Doctor! Doctor!
16. Hold Me Now

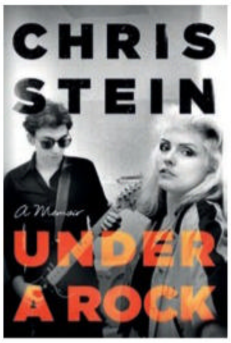
ENCORE

17. We Are Detective
18. Storm On The Sea
19. Love On Your Side

UNDER A ROCK: A MEMOIR
CHRIS STEIN
CORSAIR

★★★☆☆

A half-century after the now iconic Blondie formed on the mean streets of New York, founder Chris Stein's autobiography lifts the lid on how this group of downtown denizens broke out of the city's vibrant art scene to achieve international success and was lucky enough to survive it – just. Tracing his life from Brooklyn boyhood to the bowels of the Bowery, Stein's story describes how the bankrupt Big Apple was a breeding ground for artists, musicians and authors in the mid-70s, with talent and grit their only currency until global fame came calling.



Unmistakably in Stein's voice, the stream-of-consciousness style of storytelling can be distracting at times and frustratingly vague as a result, yet you can't help being awestruck by the life unfolding within its pages.

One of the most alarming and surprising aspects of the book, and which should be taken as a cautionary tale by anyone in the business, is how a musician can be in one of the world's biggest bands and still end up with nothing, such was the case with Chris.

Stein's bleak post-Blondie years of the early-80s are permeated by death, illness, bankruptcy and addiction – themes that have continued to haunt him intermittently right up to a devastating revelation in the epilogue.

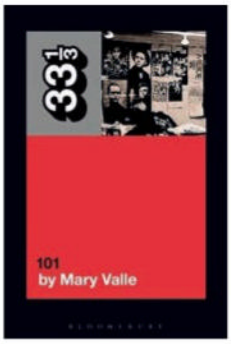
A fascinating life sadly undertold, *Under A Rock* often lacks the depth that one of the great rock'n'roll stories truly deserves. **Mark Lindores**

33⅓: DEPECHE MODE – 101
MARY VALLE
BLOOMSBURY

★★★½☆

The latest in Bloomsbury's superb *33 1/3* series of deep dives into an album is a slight departure in that it celebrates Depeche Mode's seminal live LP *101*, captured at the Pasadena Rose Bowl in 1988, rather than a studio entity.

The album was unexpected at the time, as synth-pop was still met with some suspicion and derision by certain factions over its validity and whether it held up next to 'real' live instrumentation.



The last place anyone expected the Essex fourpiece's cultish electronic odes to outsiderdom to be celebrated was in a stadium in California. Yet Depeche defied the odds and made 'Concert For The Masses' a resounding success, immortalising it in a film and live album.

Although that live recording is the foundation of this book, Valle expands on the theme by highlighting the importance of the KROQ radio station, who had championed the band throughout their career and hosted the concert.

For a group still largely perceived as niche in the US at the time (this concert preceded DM's mutation into grungy stadium rockers by six years), to attract 65,000 fans was testament to the power of the station and validated its innovative stance on promoting new and alternative acts. It also undoubtedly played a role in the subsequent creative direction of Depeche.

Add Valle's own experiences soundtracked by these songs and *101* serves as an informative and personal tribute. **ML**

SEARCHING FOR DEXYS MIDNIGHT RUNNERS
NIGE TASSELL
NINE EIGHT BOOKS

★★★★☆

Following *Whatever Happened To The C86 Kids?*, Nige Tassell's brilliant unearthing of the indie also-rans that made up the tracklist of *NME*'s much-celebrated C86 compilation cassette, the author now shifts his attention to Dexys.

Tassell trains his skills on the ranks of Kevin Rowland and co, as *Searching For Dexys Midnight Runners* tracks down the group's musicians during its imperial phase of 1978-1985.

Inside, almost 30 contributors (the band members that are no longer with us are memorialised in their own chapter) share their experiences of the making of the *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels*, *Too-Rye-Ay* and *Don't Stand Me Down* albums and the associated interviews, tours and TV spots.

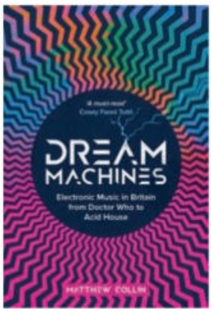
Although the former band members suffered mixed fortunes following their time in Dexys – mental illness and addiction afflicted some while others went on to enjoy success with other renowned artists – their stories pretty much align in depicting Rowland as a ruthless ringleader who has sought redemption in recent years. Kevin declined an interview for this book as he is writing his own memoir.

While Rowland's autobiography will surely be an interesting read, Tassell's prismatic portrait benefits greatly from the perceptions of a varied cast unbeholden to anyone, sharing their unfiltered truth on everything from underhand tactics, band hierarchies and the fleetingness of fame. **ML**

DREAM MACHINES: ELECTRONIC MUSIC IN BRITAIN FROM DOCTOR WHO TO ACID HOUSE
MATTHEW COLLIN
OMNIBUS PRESS

★★★★½

In what is emerging as a vintage year for books about electronic music and club culture, the need to stand out has become crucial. Matthew Collin does so with ease via his expansive history of electronica by broadening his focus to the oft-overlooked and pioneering forces that were the foundation for the tech-enhanced future.



Dating back to the experimentation of post-WWII Britain, *Dream Machines* explores the origins of electronic music and its evolution from functional surplus equipment to tools to create and communicate. A journey from the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop, to 60s psychedelia, the emergence of prog, disco, synth-pop, house, hip-hop and rave, the book also credits lesser-celebrated genres – Hi-NRG, ambient, industrialism, dub, and SAW's huge 80s success.

Featuring countless interviews with artists, musicians, engineers, producers, as well as writers and promoters, Collin strikes the perfect balance between reportage of each sub-genre and its place in social and political climes, while satiating the tech-minded by highlighting the equipment and instrumentation that allowed for these progressions.

While others focus on specific periods or genres, as a complete overview this is hard to beat. **ML**

CLASSIC POP MOMENTS

4 JULY 1988

KYLIE RELEASES HER DEBUT ALBUM

In the United States every 4 July, Americans celebrate Independence Day. For the rest of the world, however, it's a chance to mark Kylie Day, the date in 1988 in which the soon-to-be Princess of Pop released her debut album. Anticipation was at fever pitch before the unveiling of *Kylie* and by the time it landed on record shelves, the singer, then just 20, had already scored a No.1 single *(I Should Be So Lucky)* and a No.2 hit (follow-up *Got To Be Certain*). And through her success in Aussie soap *Neighbours* (where she played tomboy mechanic Charlene Robinson), her name was already more well-known than any other artist on the Stock Aitken Waterman roster – Kylie's co-star Jason Donovan wouldn't release his first album until May 1989. Though SAW were expecting big things from *Kylie*, not even their crystal ball could have predicted quite how huge it hit. The LP shot straight into the UK charts at No.2 and soon took No.1 – it went on to claim the top spot for a total of six weeks. It would also end up as the fifth biggest-selling album of the 80s in the UK and establish Kylie as a bona fide pop star, instead of simply a soap actor dabbling in music, as some corners of the media believed at the time. Now, 36 years on from its release, nobody would call it the greatest Kylie album, but it is an exquisite collection of earworms that includes some of her most fondly remembered songs, from *The Loco-motion* to *Je Ne Sais Pas Pourquoi* and the eternal *I Should Be So Lucky*. Bubblegum pop perhaps, but it's still the finest example of the genre we can think of. **Steve O'Brien**

CLASSIC POP

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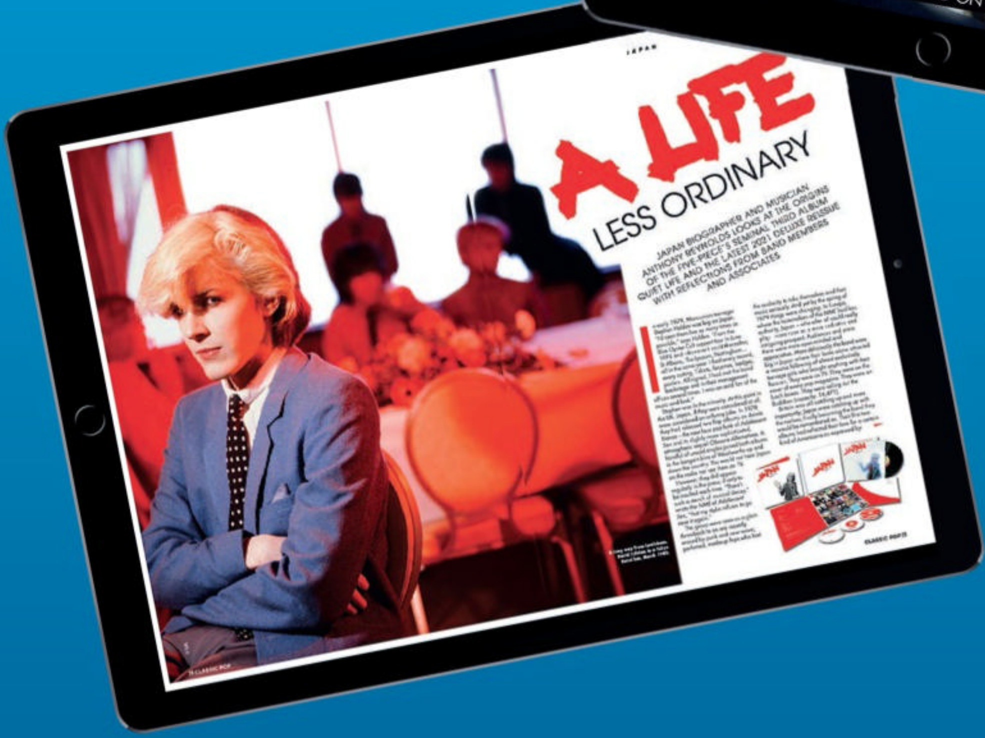

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